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DEPOPULATING SUDAN'S OIL REGIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Sudan is a desperately poor country and its oil wealth could have been a blessing for the population if there was a lasting peace. Instead, the oil-rich regions are battle grounds, upon which the lives of hundreds of thousands of people have been destroyed.

One year after Christian Aid published its report '*The Scorched Earth*', and six month after the Canadian '*Report of an Investigation into Oil Development, Conflict and Displacement in Western Upper Nile, Sudan*' compiled by Georgette Gagnon and John Ryle, civilians continue to be forcibly displaced, villages burned to the ground and helicopter gunships still kill women and children in the South. Vast areas around the oil fields are now depopulated and the original Nuer and Dinka population have been uprooted and displaced.

This war is part of the wider civil war between North and South that has raged for decades. Oil has changed the pattern of war. What used to be a low-budget bush war fought by rag-tag armies, has developed into modern counter-insurgency warfare between a-symmetric parties and the population sits on the losing side. The armed opposition attempts to maintain control over its traditional Nuer and Dinka territories by attacking military and economic targets. It has not been overly successful. Meanwhile, Government forces are establishing control over vast stretches of land by attacking the armed opposition and the civilian population. High altitude bomber planes, helicopter gunships and newly equipped ground forces have killed thousands and driven off hundreds of thousands of people, successfully depopulating vast areas.

In the middle of this human catastrophe, the oil companies pretend they are a force for the good, working for the betterment of the Sudanese people mainly because they finance a few small development projects. The most prominent oil companies present are Talisman Energy (Canada), Lundin Petroleum (Sweden), China National Petroleum Corporation (China), Petronas Carigali (Malaysia), and OMV (Austria).

Two fact finding teams saw first hand how the war is fought in operational oil Blocks 1, 2 (Ruweng County) and 5A (Western Upper Nile). The teams, one sent in February 2002 on behalf of the European Coalition on Oil in Sudan (ECOS) and the other in March 2002 on behalf of DanChurchAid and Christian Aid, witnessed the devastation, interviewed the displaced and saw the horrific effects of a modern air war carried out against women and children. The teams confirmed that civilians in Blocks 1, 2 and 5A suffered brutal attacks by Government forces and proxy militia's between October 2001 and March 2002. Tens of thousands of individuals have been driven from their homes and currently huddle in swamps, too frightened to return home.

This report was written by Diane deGuzman, who was a member of both teams. The quotations are from interviews she had with displaced people in Ruweng County and Western Upper Nile in February and March 2002.

KEY FINDINGS

1. In October 2001, the Government of the Sudan launched an offensive in the Southeast part of Ruweng County, in oil concession Block 2. It attacked the villages between Jukabar and Bal from the air and with ground troops. There were no SPLA contingents in the targeted villages and the Government troops did not encounter any armed resistance during their operations. The indigenous population of the region was forced to flee. Those who survived the attack now huddle in two areas of swampland in the Northeast and Southeast corners of their County.
2. Within a month after the depopulation of the Jukabar/Bal area in Ruweng county, the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company (GNPOC: Talisman Energy, Chinese National Petroleum Corporation, Petronas Carigali, and Sudapet) moved a drilling rig into Pakier, just West of this area. The timing of GNPOC's activity suggests that these attacks were designed to clear the way for an expansion of the oil production in the region
3. By mid-February 2002, the Northern part of Block 5A, Western Upper Nile, had been depopulated by Government troops. The Government of the Sudan claims that the purpose of its offensive was to rid the area of SPLA forces, but all available evidence shows that the civilian population was expressly targeted in an extended area along the road from the oil site at Rier and Southwards.
4. The war in the Sudan displaced millions before the oil exploitation started. However, the pattern of depopulation in Ruweng County—helicopter gunship attacks on villages, followed by murderous raids by regular Government troops and Government sponsored militias characterized by looting, torching of the huts, and finally the mining of the empty villages, cattle feed-drop sites and herding paths – are new in this war. The tactics are used effectively to deter the displaced from returning to their villages. The resulting vast empty regions, support the allegation that the Government of the Sudan is knowingly and deliberately depopulating this oil-rich area in order to make it secure for the oil business.
5. The violent depopulation in Western Upper Nile is part of a war for control of the oil-rich areas. After the SPLA-SPDF united early in 2002, they attacked Government convoys and declared the oil operations to be a valid military target, which did not fail to escalate the war. The Government immediately retaliated against the SPLA-SPDF. Villages were deliberately targeted and civilians killed. An estimated 50,000 civilians have been forced to flee.
6. Much of the fighting against rebel forces and civilians is carried out by Government sponsored militias. Interviews with recent defectors from one of these proxy militias show that they are instructed to systematically kill and displace civilians.
7. An estimated 80,000 people from Ruweng County, and another 50,000 from Western Upper Nile are currently on the move in search of safety, food and shelter. Many of them

are threatened by acute food shortages. The Government of Sudan's ban on flights carrying in food and medical assistance jeopardizes the lives of tens of thousands of people and contributes to the depopulation of the oil-rich areas.

8. The war in Ruweng County and Western Upper Nile is poorly reported. The vast region is difficult to access and the only international presence is that of rare NGO staff. Much of what goes on within the area remains unknown to the outside world. The Sudanese Government's ban on flight aid for large parts of Ruweng County and Western Upper Nile exacerbates the problem.

9. Oil revenues have flowed into the coffers of Sudan's state budget. Military expenditures have more than doubled, enabling the armed forces to acquire new weaponry such as M-24 'Hind' gunship helicopters. These have changed the military balance in Southern Sudan and are instrumental in clearing the oil regions of its population.

10. Both the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company (GNPOC) and the Lundin Petroleum/OMV/Petronas Carigali/Sudapet consortium claim they have brought development projects to the local people. However, none of the displaced that interviewed were aware of any of the companies' "social investment" activities. Although one of the oil business's contributions made by the Lundin Petroleum-led consortium for the development of the region was the building of a bridge over the Bahr el Ghazal River, the bridge's only tangible impact on the well-being of the local communities has been to enable Baggara horsemen and mechanized Government forces to access the area, and to kill, rape and chase away the people. (The Baggara are a pastoral people from northern Sudan, who now serve the Government as a para-military force.)

11. The fact that the SPLA/SPDF have declared the oil operations military targets and that the Government of the Sudan targets oil-rich regions for depopulation, contradicts the oil companies' claims that the war is unconnected to their activities. On the contrary, it supports the conviction among the local population that the depopulation of Ruweng County and Western Upper Nile is meant to secure the oil-rich terrain.

12. Despite abundant documentation and international condemnation concerning the suffering that the war in the oil regions is inflicting on the population, and the absence of any agreement between the Government and the GNPOC governing the provision of security in the oilfield area, the consortium continues to accept that its security is provided for by a Government that depopulates huge areas of land of its indigenous population. Lundin Petroleum and OMV have expressed their wish to return to work as soon as security requirements are met. But none of the oil companies have set any conditions as to the well-being, protection, and the right of return by the people on whose lands they operate.

HEGLIG AND UNITY OILFIELDS IN BLOCKS 1 & 2, RUWENG COUNTY THE DEPOPULATION POLICY CONTINUES

A BRIEF HISTORY:

Chevron first discovered oil in Heglig and Unity oilfields in 1978. That immediately started the forced depopulation of Ruweng County by Arab nomad groups, armed by the Government. Chevron left the region for security reasons in 1984, after war resumed between the Government of the Sudan and the Southern opposition.

Oil exploration and production resumed in the late 1990s when the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company (GNPOC) leased blocks 1, 2 and 4 and built a pipeline from Ruweng County to Port Sudan.

From April to July 1999, an estimated half of the population of Ruweng County, where the Unity and Heglig oilfields are located, was displaced after attacks by Government of the Sudan troops. This was confirmed in the 1999 report by the UN Special Rapporteur, Leonardo Franco. The GNPOC, however, claims that there have been no attacks, or depopulation. The companies insist that they found an ‘empty landscape’. To a degree, this is true. The County was largely empty when they arrived, but not because there were never any people there. We met the people that Talisman Energy says do not exist.

What follows is an brief account of the human rights abuses that are carried out against the population of Ruweng County, in Blocks 1 and 2.

THE PEOPLE THEY SAY DO NOT EXIST:

An estimated three-quarters of the population of Blocks 1 and 2, Ruweng County has been displaced. Since 1999, the areas around Heglig and Unity oilfields, have been largely depopulated.

In October and November 2001, a new depopulation offensive was launched on the villages between Jukabar and Bal. There were no SPLA troops in these villages. The Government troops did not encounter armed resistance. Those who survived now huddle in two areas of swampland in the Northeast and Southeast corners of their County.

Within a month after the depopulation of the area, a drilling rig was moved a short distance to the West, to a location called Pakier.

In late March, work started to prolong the all-weather road that originates in Heglig, GNPOC headquarters, extending it from Manawal, the new government garrison base, towards Bal and Jukobar.

Chief Chimum and his people were forcibly displaced from the village of El Toor seven years ago. Since then, he has been forced to flee Kumagon, Miper, Adiei, Aruch, Panlual, Mankuor and Alel. El Toor, Kumagon and Miper are now oil drilling sites. All of the other locations are on the all-weather road linking the Government of the Sudan garrisons from Heglig to Lieri.

Chief Midiing Kuot's life story is also part of the oil saga in Ruweng County. He was originally from a village near Heglig but the Government of the Sudan drove all the Southerners out eight years ago. Chief Midiing took his people east to Kuelmopiny but, as the chief related, "*The government and Talisman Energy began their expansion eastwards.*" Chief Midiing and his people were then forced to flee to Kueldit. Finally, the massive Government of the Sudan air and ground attack in October 2001 drove Chief Midiing's people out of Kueldit to one of the two remaining corners of the County still under the control of the Southern Opposition, Beam Rom (Padit 2).

First, helicopter gunships came to the Jukabar/Bal area and scattered the civilians. As they fled into the tall grass in search of cover, the helicopters flew low enough to part the grass enabling the pilots to spot the people fleeing for their lives. Then, the gunships fired directly at all those cowering in the grass. When the Government of the Sudan attacked his village of Kuelmopiny in November 2001, Bol Yout and his family ran into the bush. Bol said, "*The gunships flew so low they whipped the grass apart, exposing my children.*" The gunships came back around, bore down on his family, and killed three of his eight children – Deng, age 6, Chol, age 5, and Manjok, age 4. As his children were mowed down, Bol could see his village going up in flames.

"The helicopter gunships flew so low, I could see the faces of the pilots," stated Chigo Milwal, a former resident of Bal. *"The gunships quickly swung around and came back shooting at the people."* Chigo's cousin, Dau Ajiang and his two children were killed during the gunship attack.

Next, Government forces arrived in the villages by trucks and 'technicals' (4-WD caddy cars armed with mounted machine guns). Many people stayed in their tukuls (huts) since they had not been directly targeted during previous attacks. This time things were different. We were given names of civilians shot and killed outside their homes. Once all the civilians had fled or been killed, the soldiers torched the villages after looting the stored grain destined for the coming months and the recently collected the sorghum harvest. Alai Bol Agook and her family tried to flee into the bush when the attack began in Bal. She grabbed her two youngest children but the two teenage boys hesitated. When they realized the Government troops were killing civilians, they tried to run after Alai. Soldiers chased them, while shooting, and both fell mortally wounded. The boys managed to drag themselves into the bush. For five days, Alai searched for her two sons. *"It was the vultures gathering overhead that led me to their bodies,"* Alai quietly said. Her sons, Riang Miyiek Monyjok and Bol Miyiek Monyjok had bled to death alone in the tall grass.

Chol Minyiel Athor told of similar brutalities during the attack on his village of Nyajungo, north of Mankuor. When the Government soldiers entered his village, they shot and killed a very old man, Myuol Deng Kier, age 70. Mayuol was blind and unable to run from the soldiers. They shot him at point blank range as he sat outside his tukul. Then, according to Chol, *"They cut off his hand to steal his antique silver bracelet."*

"Many people found themselves trapped in their tukuls and were burned alive by the Government soldiers," Achol Thon Milek said when asked about the attack on Bal in November 2001. Achol personally knew of six men who were burned alive.

Chief Mirial said many people were still missing after the attack on his village in October 2001. When some of the men from the village tried to return to look for those who were missing, they found Government forces still on the ground. When they tried to get closer to the village to look for bodies, Chol Piouk Dau, age 38, stepped on a newly planted landmine and was killed. *"It was then that I gave up any hope of taking my people back home,"* lamented Chief Mirial.

Many people are still missing and unaccounted for after the attacks of 2001. Some families continue to search for their loved ones. Occasionally, someone manages to escape from one of the Government garrisons and is able to give other villagers the names of those still being held captive. Wilson Mathiang Chol has been searching the countryside for his wife and two children since his village of Bal was attacked. For months he has been looking for their corpses. Now, he is convinced they were abducted and taken to the garrison at Pariang since he has never found their bodies.

Ngunreng Mayom Chan could be said to be more fortunate than Wilson Mathiang. At least she knows the fate of her sister, Aboi Tiop Ayiik, age 18. Aboi was abducted from her village when the Government attacked in July 2001. Ngunreng agonized over the fate of her younger sister. Then, just recently, a boy who had been captured along with her sister, managed to escape. According to Ngunreng, “*Now I know that Aboi is being held by the Government at their garrison in Lieri. I just wish I knew whether she is alright.*”

Within a month after the civilian populations were driven from their homes in the Jukabar/Bal area, a drilling rig was moved a short distance to the west into a location called Pakier. Several witnesses told of seeing the light on the top of the rig at night. In late March, Chinese workers started building a prolongation of the oil road that originate in Heglig, GNPOC headquarters, in order to extend it from Manawal in the direction of Bal and Jukobar, the new government garrison,

A October-November Government offensive against villages in the east of Ruweng County, the last remaining part of the County not cleared by government forces, continued through March 2002.

The fact that the Government of the Sudan targets oil-rich regions for depopulation, contradicts the oil companies’ claims that the war is unconnected to their activities. On the contrary, it supports the conviction of the local population that the depopulation of Ruweng County and Western Upper Nile is meant to serve the oil industry's security needs.

Oil companies exacerbate war by accepting to work in areas that have been forcibly depopulated on behalf of their security. The evidence of gross and systematic human rights abuses is overwhelming and documentation extensive. The companies cannot pretend they do not know.

BLOCK 5A IN WESTERN UPPER NILE

All available evidence supports the allegation that the Government of the Sudan is deliberately depopulating the oil-rich areas of Western Upper Nile. If Lundin Petroleum and OMV's express the hope that they will be able to resume operations this year, they must base their claim on credible information received from the Government of the Sudan, implying that a prolonged offensive lasting until the Summer rains can be expected.

A BRIEF HISTORY

Tens of thousands of people have been terrorized into fleeing their villages in Western Upper Nile since early 1999. The Government has used ground attacks, helicopter gunships and Antonov bombers to clear the local population from this oil-rich area. The military tactics used by the Government and its militias which consist of destroying crops in the fields, looting livestock and occupying the area are obvious ploys bent on preventing the return of displaced populations.

Lundin Oil drilled its first successful exploratory oil well in April 1999 at Thar Jath. According to Human Rights Watch, a month later the Government moved in its troops and militias to Thar Jath and the surrounding areas. Tens of thousands of people were forced from their homes and began a trek around Western Upper Nile in search of safety. They are still homeless and on the road today.

Lundin Oil suspended operations in March 2000 when fierce fighting broke out between the Southern armed opposition and the Government of the Sudan over control of the oil area. Drilling did not resume until January 2001. Lundin never admitted that Government forces, during those ten months, burned and depopulated a huge swath of land to the South along the projected 75 kilometer all-weather road going from Lundin's base camp at Rubkona to its new oil field at Thar Jath. Also , the Lundin airstrip was significantly enlarged. Nuer civilians were driven from their land. Many of them walked hundreds of miles to the Dinka areas of Bahr el Ghazal in search of food and safety. Now, in 2002, tens of thousands of Nuers from the Western Upper Nile are on the move again, ready to walk to Bahr el Ghazal for their very survival.

On 22 January 2002, the Lundin-led consortium suspended operations in Western Upper Nile. "We'd like to resume our activities soon in the block," OMV board member Helmut Langanger commented. (Reuters, 7 March 2002). Lundin Petroleum's Chief Executive Ian Lundin stated the company would need "a sustainable peaceful environment" to resume work there (Reuters, 18 March 2002). Neither company have set conditions regarding the well being of displaced persons.

OIL BRINGS SUFFERING

The war in Western Upper Nile is very poorly reported. The vast region is difficult to access and the only international presence is of the rare NGO staff member. Many events remain unknown to the outside world.

A vicious air attack was launched on the civilian populations around Pultuni in late January 2002 and Rier at the beginning of February. Everyone interviewed stated that the gunships came in pairs three times a day when the villages were under attack, as high altitude Antonov bombers flew overhead .

Chiefs Gatluak Deng and Yang Tueth said they never saw gunships or Antonovs around their village in 2001. “*That all changed with the peace agreement between SPLA and SPDF (Southern armed opposition groups),*” said Chief Gatluak. “*Then the government troops came in force with helicopter and Antonov support. All the livestock was looted and the village was burned to the ground.*” The chiefs said that Pan Chuol, along with several other men, was abducted by the Government soldiers. The chiefs followed the soldiers who had taken Pan Chuol all the way to Rier, an oil drilling site. Chief Yang Tueth related how one Southerner managed to escape. “*He brought us the news that Pan Chuol, age 28, had been executed inside Rier.*”

Ground forces came from the garrisons at Rier and Bentiu. They burned and looted the villages. Two women told the team how soldiers snatched their youngest children from their arms. Nyakoang Duol, age 50, ran into the bush with her five children when the gunships launched a rocket attack on her village. She was holding the two youngest children when the soldiers caught them. The soldiers yanked the two children from her arms as Nyakoang pleaded with the soldiers to let them go. “*You are too old,*” the soldiers told her. “*We do not want you.*” However, they did take the time to strip Nyakoang of her clothes before disappearing with her two youngest children. “*I have no idea where my children are,*” Nyakoang told us.

Mary Nyadak Machar was from Pultuni, site of the major Government garrison protecting the new oil road and the oil drilling site at Rier. Soldiers chased her into the bush as she tried to flee with her eight children. When Mary realized she and the children could not escape, she huddled with her youngest children and begged for mercy. “*The soldiers laughed at me as they dragged the three youngest from my arms,*” Mary stated calmly. She keeps hoping for word on their whereabouts.

While the ECOS team was on the ground in Waak, Nimne was bombed resulting in the death of an MSF-H health worker. The same day, as the team arrived in Waak, a nearby village was bombed and two civilians were killed. The next day, Nhialdiu was bombed with two women killed. The day the team was leaving Waak, they witnessed a massive bombardment of Nhialdiu.

The vast region is difficult to access and the only international presence is that of an occasional NGO staff member. The 20 February 2002 air attack on the UN food distribution station in Bieh, left 24 civilians dead and provoked international outrage, but most civilians die without the world hearing about it.

HIDING BETWEEN THE RIVERS:

Most of the Northern part of Block 5A in Western Upper Nile has been depopulated after attacks by Government forces in mid-February 2002. The Government of the Sudan claims that its offensive was aimed at SPLA forces in the region, but the available evidence shows that the civilian population has been the Government of the Sudan's primary target.

An estimated 50 – 60,000 displaced are currently on the move in search of safety, food and shelter. The depopulated areas form a wide ring around the operating sites of the Lundin Petroleum-led consortium and extend the length of its access road.

Some of the displaced have fled from villages north of Nhialdiu and have walked South to Wicok across numerous swamps and rivers under the cover of darkness to a hot, dusty village called Chotchar. Others were chased from villages in the Nimne area and fled South towards Chang, Kuey, and Pam before finally dividing themselves up and settling temporarily in the villages of Wunlit and Touc.

“They want our land so they can get the oil,” said Chepak Theaf Kac in the village of Mayar Luok, near Wicok. “They do not want Southerners to remain on their land.” Rhoda Nyareak Chany, from Wangrial near Nhialdiu, lost ten of her relatives during the helicopter gunship attack on her village. “Many little children drowned in the river as they tried to escape the horsemen,” Roda explained. “The horsemen chased the people to the river and shot at them as they struggled across burdened with young children and the elderly. Even pregnant women were not spared.” Roda knew two young women, Nylaluak Riek and Nyanhialdiu, who were very near term, The horsemen still shot them as they fled.

The pattern of terrifying attacks on villages was consistent with information found during the team’s follow-up assessment in March. The team found that people had been driven from three major areas – the area between Nimne and Bentiu, the villages north of Nhialdiu, and the areas between Buoth and Rubnyagai. The people generally head South, in an attempt to put as many rivers and swamps between them and the Government ground forces. The bulk of the population of the Northern part of Block 5A, Western Upper Nile, is seeking refuge in the Southwest corner of the County just as the people of Blocks 1 and 2 in Ruweng County have been pushed into the northeast and Southeast corners of their County. In all, the depopulated areas form a wide ring around the operating sites of Lundin Petroleum-led consortium and its access road.

A CHANGE IN TACTICS

The war in the Sudan displaced millions before the oil exploitation began. However, the pattern of depopulation in the oil-rich areas – helicopter attacks on villages, followed by murderous raids conducted by ground forces, looting, the torching of huts, and finally the mining of the empty villages, their adjacent cattle feeding stations and herding paths – is new in this war. The tactics used, in Ruweng County, certainly deter the displaced from returning home. The result, vast empty regions, supports the allegation that the Government of the Sudan is knowingly and deliberately depopulating the oil-rich areas of the South in order to secure the area for the oil business.

Civilians interviewed in Blocks 1 and 2 in Ruweng County stated that they had been forced from their homes before. Previously, however, they had run into the bush while government and proxy militia forces had taken their cattle or looted their grain stocks. Once the attackers had left, the villagers had been able to return and get on with their lives as best as they could. In Ruweng County during 2001 it was different. As Chief Mirial in Beam Rom stated, “*There was a change in tactics. The Government drove the people out and took steps to ensure they did not return.*” The Chief went on to say, “*It was clear that the Government and the oil company were now ready to begin oil exploration. They did not want any Southerners in the area.*”

Anti-personnel landmines were planted around the watering points and along the pathways to areas where women collected wild food. Many witnesses stated that the anti-personnel mines were discovered after livestock set them off while trying to get to water sources.

Ajuk Maper Piuk said she and other villagers had always moved right back after a Government attack. Despite the ferocity of the attack in late 2001, she remained hidden in the bush along with the other villagers in the hope that they would be able to return home in a day or two. However, they soon learned that during the time the gunships had flown overhead, soldiers had laid anti-personnel landmines around all the watering points. “*Chol Kiir Mijok was one of the first people who returned to our village following the attack,*” Ajuk said. “*He was killed when he trod on a mine while trying to get water.*” According to Ajuk, “*Even the pathways into the forest areas where the women go to collect wild foods had been mined.*” Besides fear for mines, the IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) who were interviewed expressed fear that they would be killed or abducted by Government and proxy militias forces if they attempt to return.

The people of Western Upper Nile also said that they could not return to their villages. Everyone said that the entire Northern part of Western upper Nile, from north of Nhialdiu, East to Nimne, West to Buoth and South to Duar, Ngop, Rier, Pultuni Kuey and Chang was all war zone. This is where Lundin Petroleum projects the all-weather road to Adok. The road also serves the Government's intentions to strengthen the garrison at Payak. Huge numbers of villages were burned and civilians attacked along the Northern end of this road in early 2000. Now, the Government forces have attacked the villages along the Southern end of the road and other areas at great distances from the road such as Chang, Kuey, Waak and Ngop.

Government forces also burned and terrorized civilians on the South side of the Bahr el Ghazal River from mid to late February in the localities of Buoth to Nimne during their push on Nhialdiu. Again, villagers have made no attempt to return as they say their villagers are now a war zone. *"Four of my sons were killed by the horsemen as we tried to run to the river for safety,"* Kuany Gatpan Mut said. *"I had to leave their bodies behind. I have not been able to go back."*

"Government forces used to come to our village last year to steal cattle but they never fired on our village, never hurt the civilians, not until this year," stated Head Chief Peter Yual Yuai from a village north of Nhialdiu.

THE USE OF PROXY MILITIAS BY THE GOVERNMENT OF THE SUDAN

Much of the fighting in Southern Sudan is between rebel forces and Government proxy militias. Interviews with defectors from these militias show that they are instructed to systematically kill and forcibly displace civilians.

On 10 February 2002, eleven Dinka defected from the militia of Paulino Matiep and surrendered to Cdr. Peter Gadet's SPLA forces. All of the young men were IDPs from Bahr el Ghazal and were constrained to fight by the Matiep's militia commanders in Khartoum. "We were told we were to protect the oil fields from the SPLA. Paulino Matiep said we would be paid, that we would be given houses and would even be awarded wives," one young man said. Once they arrived in the South, the conscripts were given orders by Paulino Matiep himself to "Kill civilians and loot their livestock, take and control Nhialdiu and the oilfields, defeat the SPLA and capture Cdr. Peter Gadet dead or alive." The men decided to defect. They said many other Southerners were looking for an opportunity to escape from the militia.

The former Government of the Sudan Commissioner of Mayom, James Liley Kuol, confirmed that Paulino Matiep's people were forcibly recruiting Southerners. "From 1-9 December 2001, the Government sponsored militia of Paulino Matiep killed nine of my people in Khartoum when they resisted forced conscription," stated the former commissioner. Three were killed in Khartoum North, three in Safa, one in Agousef, and two drowned in the Nile while trying to get away. In Khartoum alone, Matiep has five officers whose job is to recruit Southerners by force if necessary. They are James Gatwiel, Thiep Gatluak, Goi Fan, Chap Tan and Kerubino Ruai Tap.

The Nuer of Western Upper Nile have to contend with other elements a part from the militia of Paulino Matiep. Thanks to the bridge across the Bahr el Ghazal River – funded by Lundin Petroleum - the Government of the Sudan has been able to bring Baggara horsemen to the Nhialdiu area. Until recently, 8 year old Dak Yiey lived in a small village near Nhialdiu, in Western Upper Nile. In mid-February Antonov bombers came, then two helicopter gunships. Finally, he saw the horses and the ground troops come storming into his village. "They ride two to a horse," said Dak. "One is riding the horse while the other is behind shooting at us with his gun."

Dak and his cousin, Pouk Deng, were terrified. They had never witnessed this type of attack before. They ran towards the grassy swamps at the edge of their village. They thought the horses would be unable to follow. Dak was in front and Pouk was just behind him. The gunships flew low overhead. The horsemen could not follow, but the helicopters took up the relentless chase. Dak reached the safety of the swamp. Pouk Deng was shot in the back of the head and killed.

FOOD AS A WEAPON – THE DENIAL OF RELIEF

*“Sudanese Government denies humanitarian access to 1.7 million people.”
(...) “These flight bans can have a devastating impact on the entire population. Extremely debilitated people will be virtually cut off from basic assistance such as food and healthcare.” (5 April 2002, World Food Program press release)*

The ban prohibiting planes to fly in with relief supplies contributes to the depopulation of the oil-rich areas.

In 1999, the World Food Program (WFP) warned of ‘a humanitarian catastrophe’ unless the government’s flight bans on Western Upper Nile were lifted. In 2002, the people of the region are faced with another crisis. During January and February the WFP began airlifts of food to many locations in Western Upper Nile. On 20 February, two Sudan Airforce helicopters attacked the village of Bieh when food was being distributed. The attack took place just as large numbers of IDPs were searching for food after being forcibly removed from their villages by government forces.

The government’s reaction was to put a flight ban on ‘all areas west of Nuer’ on March 1, 2002. *“The government has placed most of the area around Bentiu off limits to aid workers. The newly banned areas include the region where government and western oil companies have tapped into a large oil field”* (AP, March 1, 2002). Thus the aid flight ban is in line with a strategy of depopulating the oil-rich areas.

After strong criticism from the international community the government lifted the total flight ban on 4 March, but it continued to deny permission for food relief to be flown into strategic locations along the Leer-Adok corridor and elsewhere. These flight denials, combined with the aerial war, means that people in much of the region do not receive assistance nor are they protected by independent outsiders monitoring the war zone. If fighting does not empty the area, hunger might.

The coming months, a massive movement of Nuers from Western Upper Nile into the Dinka areas of Rumbek and Tonj Counties in search of food can be expected.

OIL AND WEAPONS

"Sudan will be capable of producing all the weapons it needs thanks to the growing oil industry," (Army Spokesman General Mohamed Osman Yasin)

The oil revenues allowing soaring military spending, make a mockery out of the oil companies' claims that they are a force for good in the Sudan.

Prior to oil, the war between the Government of the Sudan and the Southern opposition had reached a stalemate. Now, however, the Government of the Sudan is building a domestic arms industry as well as importing large quantities of sophisticated arms. Without the doubling of the state budget due to oil revenues, the Government would have found it impossible to procure, use and maintain the short-range tactical ballistic missiles, that were deployed last year during an attack in Southern Blue Nile, or the MiG 24 "Hind" helicopter gunships, BM-21 long range artillery or MiG 29 fighter planes. The use of the oil revenues for war escalation makes a mockery of the oil companies' claims that they are a force for good in the Sudan.

The spectacular rise in the State budget due to oil revenues has allowed for more than just weapons and ammunition. Both regular Government troops and Government sponsored militias have benefited greatly. Recruits have received salary hikes and cheap housing. Members of the militias have been told they will be given horses, money and wives.

However the increase of the defense budget has not been offset by an increase in funding for development, even less so in South than in North Sudan. There has been no campaign to win the hearts and minds of the Southerners. As Taban Deng, the former Governor of Western Upper Nile stated, "*When I was governor I never received a single penny from the oil so I could build a school.*"

THE WAR FOR THE OIL AREAS

Western Upper Nile is actually the scene of two wars. One war is for the control of the oilfields and the all-weather road between the Government of the Sudan and involves attacking the armed Southern opposition. For whoever controls that road controls access to the oil fields. The other war is an air and ground battle waged by the Government of the Sudan against the civilian population living along the road running south from the oil site at Rier

The people South of Rier were not displaced in 2000 as had been the case of their neighbours at the North end of the road. By the time Lundin began road construction South of Rier, the predominant armed faction in this region, the Sudan People's Democratic Front (SPDF), had agreed to a period of 'co-operation' with the Government of the Sudan. The depopulation strategy used in Ruweng County to clear Blocks 1 and 2, and the north end of the new oil road in Western Upper Nile, in mostly SPLA controlled territory, was not used against the Nuers at the Southern SPDF-controlled end of the road until early 2002.

The "Peace of Koch" between the SPDF commander, Peter Paar, and the SPLA commander, Peter Gadet in January 2002 brought an end to the cooperation between SPDF and the Government of the Sudan. After that, the armed opposition attacked Government convoys and declared the oil operations a military target. The current Government offensive is attempting to make the area secure for the oil industry. However, the tactics employed by the Government go beyond fighting the armed opposition. It includes the deliberate targeting of the civilian population, with the undeclared aim of making displacement permanent.

Before the two local armed groups united, the women said they never saw helicopter gunships or Antonov bombers over their villages. "*Yes, the Government troops used to come to our village to demand grain, and they would beat anyone who refused. However, no one had to flee for their lives.*" Now, the women and children have walked for as many as fifteen days from places such as Rier, under cover of darkness, to reach safety in Waak. It took Nyakoang Duol, with her three children, ten days to reach Waak walking only at night to avoid being spotted by the gunships. There was little drinking water along the way and her children suffered greatly. She was worried that the Government of the Sudan found the peace agreement between SPLA and SPDF unsatisfactory. "*The Government of the Sudan wants Southerners to continue fighting amongst ourselves. Even during the period of cooperation between SPDF and the Government of the Sudan in 2001, the government soldiers drove Southerners from their homes and killed people along the new oil road if they thought they were assisting Cdr. Peter Gadet,*"

The relationship between oil and security has moved far beyond simple defense. The Dinka and Nuer peoples are driven from their oil-rich ancestral lands. The oil companies claim to bring peace through development. But oil has brought death and destruction to tens of thousands of displaced families.

None of the oil companies have drawn up conditions regarding the well-being, protection or the right of return of the suffering people on whose lands they operate.

The SPLA/SPDF merger changed the military balance in Western Upper Nile. The oil installations were declared a military target and convoys came under bloody attacks between 13-25 January 2002. Thus the SPLA/SPDF forces heavily contributed to the escalation of the war. The Government reacted with aerial attacks, and used both Antonovs and helicopter gunships, on Tagil, Padeah, Koch and many other locations throughout January and February.

Lundin Petroleum announced suspension of its operations on 22 January 2002, nearly a month after the attack on its oil installation at Rier. Both the road construction workers and Lundin staff were evacuated from the area. This suspension was not a protest against the crimes committed for the sake of the industry's safety. Operations were suspended because of insecurity.

The area around Nhialdiu was depopulated in February and the town itself captured on 22 February. The SPLA regrouped and retook Nhialdiu on 29 February, but only held it for one day. By Easter Sunday, the Government forces had retaken control. The Government of the Sudan seems to have turned its attention from the road in a bid to take and hold the area all the way South to Boaw where old Chevron capped wells are located. By the end of February, the Government of the Sudan had made great strides in forcing civilians out of the area but had not yet sent ground forces to occupy it. The SPLA and SPDF will continue their efforts to push the Government forces and their proxy militias out. However, the odds seem to be against them.

The cease-fire in the Nuba Mountains has allowed the Government to move convoys of troops further South to join the war for oil going on in Blocks 1 and 2 lying in Ruweng County, and Block 5A in Western Upper Nile. One convoy had already reached Ruweng County from Tolodi during the time the fact finding team was on the ground.

The Government also intends to strengthen the garrison at Payak near Leer with two battalions before the rains begin. Consequently, an air war against the villages in the area can be expected as part of the strategy to secure the road by depopulating the area around the all-weather extention. Only after that can Lundin Petroleum be expected to resume operations. More offensives are likely as the Government seems to be preparing

for an all out effort to secure Block 5A in order to ensure that oil exploitation can resume in 2002.

The first time Lundin announced suspension in early 2000, the Government of the Sudan conducted a savage depopulation offensive along the new oil road in Western Upper Nile. This time, Lundin Petroleum and OMV senior management have publicly expressed the hope that operations will be resumed in December 2002, after the rains.

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