

Congressmen call for U.S. special peace envoy to end war in Sudan

by Linda de Hoyos

On Sept. 17, 1997, Roger Winter, executive director of the U.S. Committee on Refugees, and John Prendergast of the U.S. National Security Council, used a conference of the U.S. Institute for Peace as a forum to demand a policy by the U.S. government for a full-scale war against Sudan, "even though I know this will cause a humanitarian catastrophe." The war would not be waged by U.S. troops, according to the plan, but through U.S. aid to Sudan's neighbors—Uganda, Eritrea, and Ethiopia. Prendergast, a longtime ally of Winter, chortled that the "team" that would carry out this policy from the State Department—Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Susan Rice, David Dunn of the East Africa Affairs Department, along with Prendergast himself—was now in place. Winter promised Khartoum would "fall by December."

Ten months later, the government of Sudan is still strongly in power; the coalition of "allies" entrusted militarily with the mission to invade Sudan and seize Khartoum, has had a "falling out," with the outbreak in May of the Eritrea-Ethiopia war; and militarily in the south and to the east, there has been no real progress.

What *has* been accomplished, is the "humanitarian catastrophe." Throughout southwestern Sudan and in the east, a famine caused by drought and the war is threatening the lives of millions, and people, especially the young, are dying.

The disaster, combined with stagnation in the military theater, has prompted a new push for the United States to reverse course and discard the war policy of Winter, Rice, et al., and appoint a Presidential Special Envoy to pursue peace. On June 4, U.S. Reps. Tony Hall (D-Ohio) and Frank Wolf (R-Va.) wrote an open letter to President Clinton calling on him to appoint a special envoy to Sudan, "a high-level diplomat of stature and experience, such as Sam Nunn or James Baker III. . . . With your full support, backing, and authority, such an envoy would signal the seriousness about pressing for an end to the war. . . . Sen. George Mitchell and Richard Holbrooke have made a difference in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, and hopefully, in Cyprus. Why not in Sudan?"

Neither Hall nor Wolf are considered "friends of Sudan." Hall is a strong supporter of Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, upon whom the United States has relied for prosecuting the war against Sudan in the south and aiding the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) of the recalcitrant John Garang. Wolf has worked closely with Baroness Caroline

Cox, Deputy Speaker of the House of Lords and leader of Christian Solidarity International, loudest lobbyists for war against Sudan in Washington.

In their open letter to the President, Hall and Wolf note that the war in Sudan "goes on and on. . . . The current humanitarian crisis in southern Sudan is a wake-up call to the United States and to the international community that our business-as-usual approach is not working. . . . Sadly, as the war dragged on year after year, humanitarian efforts have not begun to be matched by the level of political resolve or diplomatic attention necessary to bring an end to the conflict. . . . The festering conflict in Sudan stands out as a glaring impediment to peace and stability throughout the region. The people of Sudan are hungry for an end to the war that is destroying a generation of youth. . . . An aggressive effort is needed to bring peace to Sudan. It is time that the United States and the international community began caring about Sudan the way we have about Bosnia and Ireland. Where the United States has stepped up to the plate and led in such efforts, results have been promising."

On June 15, Hall reiterated that the "United States needs to re-examine our policy toward Sudan—and place a higher priority on strengthening regional efforts to reach a negotiated settlement, including an immediate cease-fire." Hall said that given the Sudan government's willingness to negotiate, a "window of opportunity exists here to push for such a monitored cease-fire—but it will require the active interest of the United States, as well as Sudan's neighbors."

In negotiations in Nairobi in May under the auspices of the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD, comprised of the Horn of Africa countries, Kenya, Sudan, and Uganda), the Sudan government had called for a cease-fire. But, this was rejected by Garang's SPLA, presumably with the encouragement of its backers.

Ending the silent war

The desire on the part of the southern Sudanese people to end the 15-year-long war in the region, is matched by the growing demand in Uganda to end the 12-year-long war in northern Uganda, which has mirrored the war in southern Sudan. The call for a U.S. Special Envoy to pursue a peace policy for southern Sudan was endorsed on July 6 by Bishop Benoni Ogwal-Abwang, the former Bishop for the northern

war districts of Gulu and Kitgum in northern Uganda and currently in exile in the United States. Speaking “on behalf of the Acholi community of northern Uganda and on behalf of its religious leaders, I strongly endorse the call by Rep. Tony Hall of June 15 calling upon the United States to ‘work harder for a resolution’ ” to the war in southern Sudan.

Whereas the plight of the southern Sudanese has received press attention in the West, the famine conditions in northern Uganda, caused by the war and drought, have gone unnoticed. As one aide worker said, “Museveni has not been forthcoming about the situation in northern Uganda.” The Bishop has called for an additional special envoy to be appointed to the situation in northern Uganda, charged with the mission of guaranteeing a framework for negotiations between the Ugandan government and the rebel Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), which has preyed upon the people of northern Uganda with impunity from Museveni’s Ugandan Popular Defense Forces (UPDF).

The war in southern Sudan and the war in northern Uganda are intertwined. For 12 years, the Museveni government and the LRA have been locked in a no-win war similar to the non-ending war in southern Sudan. Whereas the LRA since 1994 has found safe haven in Sudan and some logistical support, the SPLA shares barracks in northern Uganda with Museveni’s UPDF. Whereas the southern Sudanese are afflicted with drought and famine caused by war, the northern Ugandans, many from the same ethnic communities as in southern Sudan, are also now facing starvation, with a half-million people herded into concentration camps—so-called protected villages—where they are slowly being starved to death.

In Uganda, the demand for peace is being “preached from the pulpits,” and is even coming from the military. According to the Kenya *East African*, the top military commander of the UPDF in northern Uganda, Brig. Katumba Wamala, demanded on June 9 that the government find cheaper ways than bloodshed to end the insurgency. “Is killing the solution? Can we reach out and talk to the rebels?” The Archbishop of the Church of Uganda, Rt. Rev. Livingston Mpalanyi Nkoyoyo, and the Catholic Emmanuel Cardinal Wamala, have also appealed to the government to negotiate with the LRA. The Ugandan Joint Christian Council proclaimed that “if the government doesn’t change its present military policy with regard to war-ridden areas where incidences of human torture, abductions, and loss of lives have become notoriously rampant, the long-suffering people in those areas may regard themselves as having been neglected or abandoned by government.”

At a three-day conference in the northern city of Gulu in June, religious and civic leaders demanded that Museveni “extend an olive branch” to the LRA. Church of Uganda Bishop Nelson Onono-Onweng of Gulu deplored the government’s “lack of will” to end the conflict and accused “foreign powers” of using Uganda as a base to fight Sudan, to the detriment of the northern Ugandan people. For the first time, the calls for peace were given international attention in the

press, other than *EIR*, being covered by Associated Press and Agence France Presse.

However, Museveni is deaf to such appeals. “There is no compromise with terrorists and criminals,” he said at the end of June. “Should terrorists kill people and not be arrested? You human rights groups should demand that these criminals be arrested.” Museveni continues to insist on a “military solution” to the insurgencies in the north, despite no sign of victory after 12 years. If anything, the LRA rebels operate with such impunity, extending their areas of operation even to the east into Soroti and beyond, that many in Uganda wonder whether the UPDF is deployed to defeat or support the LRA.

The war against Sudan continues

Museveni’s recalcitrance is backed by the Winter team in the U.S. State Department. According to Kimberly Miller, a Congressional staffer who accompanied Hall on a late-May trip to southern Sudan, Hall has begun discussions with the administration on his proposal for a peace envoy. The response has been the lame refusal that if the United States were to adopt a higher diplomatic profile in the region, it would embolden “Muslim extremists.” U.S. Committee on Refugees staffer Jeff Drumtra, recently returned from southern Sudan, on July 9 answered a question on why there is not a drive for peace, given the humanitarian disaster, by stating that “there are different ways to achieve peace—the carrot and the stick.” Despite its manifest failure, and despite the cost in civilian lives, the “stick” is the policy.

There are signs that escalation of war against Sudan remains not only a key motivation but an agenda item in efforts by Assistant Secretary of State Rice and others to mediate the conflict between two of their “new breed” of African leaders, Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia and Isaias Afwerki of Eritrea. On June 14, Yaman Gebre Meske, adviser to Afwerki, called for an international peacekeeping force to come into the territory under dispute. The plan, he said, has the backing of the United States, which would supply “logistical support.” The plan undoubtedly has the support of Rice, who has been shuttling between Addis Ababa and Asmara since the war broke out. Rice has been key in formulating the blueprint for the United States African Crisis Response Initiative, for the creation of regional African peacekeeping forces. In East Africa, this force is based in Uganda, where U.S. Special Forces have been sent to train the Ugandan military.

According to well-placed sources, such a peacekeeping force, to be composed of Ugandan forces, would be turned against Sudan, from the Eritrean front, which is believed to be a far more efficient route to bring down the government in Khartoum. Even with the war against Ethiopia, Eritrea has maintained military operations against Sudan. Eritrean forces were repulsed on June 18 after a heavy battle along seven positions on the Eritrean-Sudanese border, according to Sudan Radio. Sudan also has managed to regain control of the Adig port in eastern Sudan, from Eritrea.