

Africa Report by Linda de Hoyos

Albright discredits IGAD process on Sudan

With its stance as a belligerent, the U.S. State Department has wrecked the chances for peace.

In a statement read by David Scheffer, U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes, to a Capitol Hill seminar on Nov. 10, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright enunciated current administration policy on Sudan: "Since the National Islamic Front seized power from a democratically elected government in 1989, the United States has been at odds with the government of Sudan. That regime has actively supported international terrorist organizations and regional insurgencies. Our policy is to isolate the government of Sudan, to counter the threat it poses to the United States, its neighbors, and its own people; and to press for fundamental change in its policies."

The seminar was sponsored by Christian Solidarity International, a non-governmental organization that was just thrown out of the United Nations, on charges that its highly publicized "buying and freeing slaves" in southern Sudan constituted slave-trading, and that it was encouraging, not discouraging, abduction in Sudan. The Swiss-based CSI has been the major conduit of misinformation on Sudan into the United States, through its leader, Baroness Caroline Cox, a Deputy Speaker of the British House of Lords.

No sooner had she enunciated this war posture against Sudan, than Albright turned around and declared that this policy would be carried out by the United States working toward a comprehensive peace settlement. "To this end, the United States has worked intensely this year to revitalize the peace process led by Sudan's East African neighbors through the Intergovernmental Authority on Development

(IGAD)."

According to her, U.S. efforts had led to the appointment of a full-time Kenyan envoy, and the establishment of a peace process Secretariat and technical committees for IGAD. Furthermore, she said, "the United States is funding one-half of the secretariat's costs for its first six months."

In short, in order to further its policies to "counter," "isolate," and "pressure" Sudan, the State Department under Albright has taken over the body that is supposed to mediate the peace process to end the 16-year-long war between the Sudan government and the Sudanese People's Liberation Army of John Garang. This *officially* turns IGAD from a presumably neutral mediating body, into one tasked with carrying out U.S. policy against the Sudan government, because if IGAD officials go against U.S. policy, they risk having their funding pulled.

During her visit to Africa in October, Albright and Garang held a highly publicized meeting, emerging with high praise for Garang's dedication and commitment, and stating U.S. backing for his efforts. These efforts, however, have made no progress, but succeeded in bringing about the deaths of 2 million southern Sudanese, and the internal displacement of millions more.

In her statement to the Hill, Albright reported that the United States "is helping to build the foundations for democracy by supporting civil society and civil governance through our Sudan Transitional Assistance for Rehabilitation program, which we have just expanded to include opposition-controlled areas in northern and eastern

Sudan." In the same way now, Garang has become an *official* pawn of the United States in its ill-conceived war against the Sudan government.

In Nairobi, Albright had categorically rejected the peace-mediating efforts of Egypt and Libya, which would bring together all the parties in Sudan, including the northern opposition, which has no seating in the IGAD process.

In response to her statements, Sudanese Foreign Minister Mustafa Osman Ismail wrote Organization of African Unity Secretary General Salim Ahmed Salim, charging that Albright's statements show that there is an "American plot" aimed at "disintegrating the unity of Sudan," in violation of the Organization of African Unity charter.

Albright's hawkish stance toward Khartoum flies in the face of the view of U.S. allies toward Sudan. Last month, Washington's NATO ally Britain resumed full diplomatic relations with Sudan broken in 1997, and the British ambassador is back in Khartoum.

Just as Albright was brandishing her sword, the European Union was announcing that it proposes to renew dialogue with Sudan. EU delegation chief Tuunanen Heikki told a press conference in Khartoum that the Sudan government "had taken encouraging actions," prompting the EU to consider reviving a dialogue that had been cut off three years ago. The EU, Heikki said, wants "to promote the peace process, the development in the areas of democratic institutions and human rights through this dialogue, in which we can exchange views and experiences."

France is Sudan's third-largest trading partner, and, according to some French journalists, is not eager for the United States' entry for investment and trade into Sudan.