

Assessing the Effectiveness of Counterinsurgency Mass Killing: the Case of Sudan's Second Civil War

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1. Introduction

This paper presents a case study analysis of Sudan's second North-South civil war (1983-2005), with the goal of assessing the impact of Khartoum's counterinsurgency mass killing on the outcome of the conflict. After twenty years of brutal fighting, causing two million deaths and displacing over four million people, the Sudanese government and the southern rebels reached a negotiated settlement, allocating to the South a substantial share of political power and economic resources. The central question animating this paper is whether (and how) the government's mass killing contributed to its inability to defeat the rebels or whether instead the government decided to negotiate due to other factors, in spite of mass killing's effectiveness.

Exploring the impact of mass killing on civil war outcomes is relevant to the ever expanding academic debates on civil war dynamics and counterinsurgency strategies and has important policy implications. The academic literature has long emphasized the tendency for indiscriminate violence against civilians in counterinsurgency to backfire, in particular by helping the guerrillas to mobilize their base of support. Targeted violence is generally seen as more effective but also more difficult, due to its demanding intelligence requirements. The literature does acknowledge instances of governments crushing rebellions by systematically and indiscriminately targeting civilians (e.g., the British war against the Boers; the US campaign against Filipino insurgents at the turn of the 20th Century; Saddam Hussein's repression of Kurdish rebellions), but strong disagreements remain as

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to the conditions under which mass killing can be effective. Some authors imply that mass killing “works” only in ethnic civil wars,¹ others posit that a large asymmetry of power between government and rebel forces is the key factor,² while still others stress the isolation of domestic insurgents from outside material support as an essential condition for mass killing to quell the rebellion.³

This paper aims to contribute to this debate by exploring the conditions and mechanisms through which the targeting of civilians affected the outcome of the Sudanese war. By definition, a single case study cannot provide evidence of general patterns. In particular, my choice of a case of ethnic war does not allow us to directly address the important question of whether mass killing produces similar effects in ideological civil wars. Notwithstanding this limitation, this approach is useful for two reasons. First, a detailed understanding of a single case can be seen as a step toward accumulating knowledge necessary to conduct comparative case studies and large-N analyses. Second, having identified the causal mechanisms relevant to the case under examination, it is possible to ask how common the conditions under which these mechanisms operate are and thus provide a preliminary assessment of generalizability of the observed causal relations.

The question of the effectiveness of mass killing may seem irrelevant from a policy point of view, because even if there were evidence that large-scale targeting of civilians is likely to work (under some circumstances), there would still be an overwhelming moral case against resort to this practice. However, there are some respected – albeit admittedly removed from mainstream discourse – analysts and pundits that advocate a coercive approach to counterinsurgency, downplaying the importance of winning popular allegiance and stressing the goal of terrorizing rebels’ supporters with violent reprisals, which has often led to mass killing in the past.⁴ Noting

¹ Chaim D. Kaufmann, “Intervention in Ethnic and Ideological Civil Wars,” *Security Studies* 6, no. 1, 2006 (Fall), pp. 62-100.

² Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006.

³ Alexander B. Downes, “Draining the Sea by Filling the Graves: Investigating the Effectiveness of Indiscriminate Violence as a Counterinsurgency Strategy,” *Civil Wars* 9, no. 4, 2007 (December), pp. 420-444.

⁴ For some examples of these views, see Colin H. Kahl, “COIN of the Realm: Is There a Future for Counterinsurgency?”, *Foreign Affairs* 86, no. 6, 2007 (November/December).

this, of course, does not imply a rejection of the moral argument. However, scenarios in which the outcome of policy debate on COIN strategy is not primarily driven by moral considerations are not so far-fetched (if they were, probably mass killing would be a much rarer phenomenon); thus, the issue of effectiveness remains important.

Moreover, a better understanding of effectiveness of indiscriminate violence against civilians in COIN can provide insights on strategies of war conduct for civil war belligerents, which can in turn be useful to decide on appropriate forms of international humanitarian intervention.⁵ Finally, even if one rules out the possibility of learning valid general lessons from a single case, an analysis of mass killing's role in the Sudanese civil war may provide important insight on the risk of renewed violence in Sudan and on the strategies that the belligerents would likely follow in case the war were to restart.

This paper presents a theoretical argument combining different coercive mechanisms proposed in the literature on civil war conduct and counterinsurgency; in particular, it emphasizes the mechanism of *denial* (essentially the government's ability to "attrite" resources that the rebels need to keep fighting), which is generally underplayed in favor of mechanisms specific to punitive coercion.⁶ My main empirical finding is that the success of Khartoum's mass killing counterinsurgency depended on the degree of military support offered to the rebels by Sudan's neighbors; in phases of the war in which this support was forthcoming, the insurgents experienced rapid progress on the battlefield; by contrast, when support dried up, the government had the upper hand. This alternating pattern of military successes is consistent with my denial-centered argument, while alternative explanations perform less well.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. The next section summarizes the main debates in the literature on indiscriminate targeting of civilians in counterinsurgency. Section three presents a detailed history of the second North-South Sudanese war. The fourth section analyzes the

⁵ Taylor B. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: the Conditions for Success and Failure*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2007.

⁶ The work of Alexander Downes represents an important exception to this statement.

strategic logic of Khartoum's mass killing policy. Section five directly addresses the issue of effectiveness, trying to see if the pattern of developments on the battlefield emerging from the history of the war is consistent with theoretical arguments about how mass killing can work. Section six concludes by summarizing my main findings and exploring their generalizability to other cases.

2. Overview of the Literature on Targeting of Civilians in Civil War

The number of studies on the targeting of civilians in civil war has rapidly increased in the past few years. The emerging consensus seems to be that, contrary to popular belief, this phenomenon is not simply the product of fighters' racist hatred, frustration and poor discipline (although these factors may often be present); rather, civilian targeting is better understood in terms of strategic military logic.⁷ For example, Benjamin Valentino and his co-authors find that the best predictor of the occurrence of government-sponsored mass killing during war after 1945 is the resort to guerrilla warfare by one of the belligerents; in addition, within the universe of guerrilla conflicts, the level of threat posed by the insurgents to the government's hold on power and the extent to which the civilian population supports the rebels are positively correlated with the probability of mass killing.⁸ The authors conclude that mass killing represents a calculated military response against the difficult challenges posed by guerrilla warfare.⁹ Similarly, Stathis Kalyvas argues that indiscriminate civilian targeting in civil war often is not a gratuitous or exclusively vengeful act, but rather represents an

⁷ In addition to the studies on civil war cited below, see the growing body of literature on the strategic logic of indiscriminate terrorist violence.

⁸ Benjamin Valentino, Paul Huth and Dylan Balch-Lindsay, "'Draining the Sea': Mass Killing and Guerrilla Warfare," *International Organization* 58, 2004 (Spring), pp. 375-407. The authors operationalize mass killing as the intentional killing of at least 50,000 noncombatants over the course of five years or less.

⁹ Downes identifies a similar strategic logic for civilian victimization in interstate wars. Finding that noncombatants are more likely to be targeted during costly, protracted wars of attrition, he interprets civilian victimization as the product of desperation to win and save lives on one's own side by coercing the enemy into submission. In addition, Downes finds a correlation between civilian victimization and wars of territorial expansion, suggesting that civilian targeting is more likely when the territory that a state seeks to annex is inhabited by enemy noncombatants (Alexander B. Downes, *Targeting Civilians in War*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2008).

attempt to deter noncombatants from collaborating with the other side when more targeted violence is not possible for lack of accurate information on individual behavior.¹⁰

While the notion of civilian victimization as simply the product of irrationality has largely been discredited, substantial disagreement remains among both scholars and practitioners of counterinsurgency on the effectiveness of mass killing. Many analysts argue that the incumbent's indiscriminate targeting of noncombatants in guerrilla warfare tends to backfire, generating resentment among the civilian population and increasing its support for the rebels; on the contrary, the key to successful counterinsurgency lies in the government's ability to control the population with sustained, manpower-intensive policing activities, thus denying the rebels access to civilians. Freed from the threat of rebel retaliation, the civilian population becomes more willing to provide the incumbent with intelligence on the guerrilla forces, which can then be targeted and destroyed by the government's superior military power. Moreover, the supporters of this approach often stress the role of political, social and economic reform programs, in addition to the provision of security, as important to weaken the civilian base of support for the rebels.¹¹ This concept of counterinsurgency, often referred to as "hearts and minds", arguably represents today's mainstream view and is embodied in the new US Army/Marine Corps's Counterinsurgency Field Manual.¹²

A radically opposed view on targeting civilians in counterinsurgency is represented by what I call, for lack of a better term, the "scorched-earth" approach, which is sceptical about the

¹⁰ Kalyvas. *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. Jeremy Weinstein offers an important critique of explanations of civilian targeting in terms of strategic calculus. His main contention is that initial rebel groups' endowments determine the type of violence that they are likely to perpetrate against the civilian population. Groups that rely on "social endowments" are likely to wage "activist" rebellions, characterized by limited and discriminate violence against noncombatants. By contrast, groups that base their appeal on "economic endowments" are likely to be engaged in "opportunistic" rebellions and resort to large scale indiscriminate violence against civilians. Weinstein's argument, however, does not represent a radical rejection of the notion that indiscriminate violence can be animated by a strategic logic. The book is more about the existence of path-dependent processes that constrain the type of violence that groups are likely to resort to; but given those constraints, indiscriminate violence is, at least to some extent, strategically rational. So for example, Weinstein presents RENAMO's indiscriminate violence in Mozambique as a consequence of both sheer indiscipline and the impossibility of selectively targeting civilians, given the very limited availability of information on the identity of government collaborators (Jeremy M. Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: the Politics of Insurgent Violence*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006).

¹¹ See, for example, Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, 1986, pp. 10-16.

¹² US Army and the Marine Corps. *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2007.

possibility of winning popular allegiance and at the same time stresses the utility of overwhelming firepower to destroy guerrilla forces and compel the population to stop helping the rebels.¹³ Without claiming that “hearts and minds” is unlikely to work, Alexander Downes’s recent work on non-combatant victimization in civil war explores the conditions under which the coercion approach could be effective. Downes suggests that mass killing could affect the outcome of the counterinsurgency effort through a combination of coercion by denial and punishment: scorched-earth tactics and population resettlement can effectively deny the rebels access to the population and resources that they need to keep fighting; at the same time, by inflicting tremendous and increasing suffering on civilians, these measures can convince active guerrillas to surrender. Based on a case study of Britain’s war against the Boers, Downes argues that these punishment and denial strategies are likely to work under three conditions: a small population from which the insurgency draws its support; a small theatre of operations; and the absence of both a sanctuary where the rebels can take refuge and external sources of supply.¹⁴

Kalyvas’s position can be interpreted as falling somewhere in between the “hearts and minds” and the scorched-earth approaches.¹⁵ According to Kalyvas, the population’s exclusive collaboration with the incumbent is essential to defeat an insurgency. Individual behavior, however, is not primarily a function of preferences, ethnic identities or ideological sympathies; thus civic action programs are unlikely to make a substantial difference. The key determinant of individual collaboration with the incumbent is the level of its control (i.e., exclusive rule) over a given area,

¹³ See, for example, Edward Luttwak, “Dead End: Counterinsurgency Warfare as Military Malpractice,” *Harper’s Magazine*, 2007(February); Ralph Peters, “Progress and Peril: New Counterinsurgency Manual Cheats on the History Exam,” *Armed Forces Journal*, 2007 (February) (available at <http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/2007/02/2456854>, accessed on April 16, 2010); Martin van Creveld, “On Counterinsurgency,” in Katherina von Knop, Heinrich Neisser, Martin van Creveld (eds.), *Countering Modern Terrorism: History, Current Issues and Future Threats*, Bertelsmann Verlag, Bielefeld.

¹⁴ Downes, “Draining the Sea by Filling the Graves.”

¹⁵ Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. Kalyvas’ work can be considered as part of the “coercion school”, an approach to counterinsurgency that discounts the possibility of changing popular political attitudes and thus focuses on coercion of the civilian population through targeted, rather than indiscriminate, measures; see, in particular, Michael D. Shafer, “The Unlearned Lessons of Counterinsurgency,” *Political Science Quarterly* 103, no. 1, 1988 (Spring), pp. 57-80.

because for most human beings survival beats all other considerations.¹⁶ Control is a function of geographical factors (e.g., the level of urbanization, the accessibility of terrain and the vicinity to main roads) and the amount of military resources (in particular number of troops) that the incumbent can bring to bear. Given that often available troops are too few to establish full and permanent control in a country torn by civil war, governments resort to violence as a means of deterring defection and coercing collaboration.

Kalyvas distinguishes between selective violence (personalized targeting, typically taking the form of assassination, due to individual “guilt”) and indiscriminate violence (collective targeting, in which guilt by association replaces individual guilt). Indiscriminate violence is likely to backfire: when compliance with the government’s authority guarantees no protection against indiscriminate violence, collaboration with the rebels may increase the individual’s chance of survival and fulfil a natural desire for revenge.¹⁷ Targeted killing, on the other hand, can be an effective deterrent, but in order to use it the incumbent needs detailed information on individual behavior, which in turn requires collaboration, itself a function of control.

However, Kalyvas acknowledges that situations characterized by a steep imbalance of forces between government and rebels may represent exceptions to the rule that indiscriminate violence does not generate civilian compliance: when the insurgents are so weak that they cannot protect the population, anger and desire to revenge provoked by indiscriminate violence do not translate into armed reaction but rather give way to passive submission to the government.¹⁸ This punitive coercion effect may be accompanied by direct attrition of rebel forces, in extreme cases leading to the outright destruction of the rebel organization. If the rebels are very weak, the civilians (after

¹⁶ Control can even induce ethnic defection, the process whereby individuals join organizations explicitly opposed to the national aspirations of their ethnic group and end up fighting against co-ethnics; see, in particular, Stathis Kalyvas, “Ethnic Defection in Civil War,” *Comparative Political Studies* 41, no. 8, 2008 (August): 1043-1068.

¹⁷ Kalyvas. *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, p. 143. The argument applies to both government and rebel actions, but Kalyvas does acknowledge the “relative dearth of indiscriminate violence among insurgents” (ibid., p. 170).

¹⁸ Kelly Greenhill presents an argument, based on behavioral psychology, according to which COIN campaigns that impose extreme duress on civilians may be effective because the failure to meet basic physiological needs renders individuals exclusively interested in their physical survival and unwilling to take part in the collective effort of rebellion; see Kelly M. Greenhill, “Draining the Sea or Feeding the Fire? Forced Migration in Insurgency and Counterinsurgency Operations,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, 2004.

overcoming a collective action problem) could successfully petition or force the insurgents to stop their operations so as to prevent further government violence; alternatively, the population of a given area could defect to the incumbent and receive its protection against rebel retaliation.¹⁹ This mechanism implies a divergence of interests between rebels and civilians (i.e., a principal-agent problem). A different but related mechanism assumes a substantial coincidence of interests between insurgents and civilians so that the guerrilla fighters could be coerced to stop fighting by the threat of unacceptable punishment inflicted on their families or, more generally, on the civilian population from which they are drawn.²⁰ In a variant of the same mechanism, a local rebel faction (rather than the insurgent group as a whole) may defect to the government side (or be deterred from switching back to the rebel side) due to the threat of indiscriminate violence against the area that the faction controls; this is possible if the main rebel organization is relatively weak, so that it cannot threaten as much violence as the government against the disloyal faction.

A fourth view of counterinsurgency holds that the most important measure is cutting off the insurgency's external sources of supplies and sealing off cross-border sanctuaries. Once the theatre of operations is isolated "hearts and minds" or more aggressive approaches can work.²¹

The perspectives outlined above more or less explicitly posit that counterinsurgency follows a similar logic in ideological and ethnic civil wars; however, this point is debated. In particular, Chaim Kaufmann argues that the two types of wars are fought in radically different ways.²² Consistent with the "hearts and minds" concept, Kaufmann sees ideological civil wars as contests between government and rebels for the allegiance of the population. Given that the government lacks intelligence on the identity and specific location of the insurgents, it cannot hope to win the war by attrition, which is to say, by killing all (or a critical mass of) the insurgents; in fact, attrition

¹⁹ Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, pp. 154-155; Jason Lyall, "Does Indiscriminate Violence Incite Insurgent Attacks? Evidence from Chechnya," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53, no. 3, 2009, pp. 331-362 (in particular, pp. 7-11); Matthew A. Kocher, Thomas B. Pepinsky and Stathis Kalyvas, "Bombing as an Instrument of Counterinsurgency in the Vietnam War," unpublished manuscript, 2009 (September).

²⁰ Downes (*Draining the Sea by Filling the Graves*) finds evidence of this dynamic during the Boer insurgency.

²¹ See, Paul Staniland, "Defeating Transnational Insurgencies: The Best Offense Is a Good Fence,"

The Washington Quarterly 29, no. 1, 2005 (Winter), pp. 21-40; Jason Lyall and Isaiah Wilson III, "Rage Against the Machines: Explaining in Counterinsurgency Wars," *International Organization* 63, 2009 (Winter), pp. 67-106.

²² Kaufmann, "Intervention in Ethnic and Ideological Civil Wars."

is likely to backfire, by alienating the population and thus expanding the rebel ranks. By contrast, ethnic civil wars are contests for territorial control, rather than for popular loyalties. Communal identities during large-scale violence tend to be extremely hard to change, so that government and rebels do not compete for the same pool of recruits. This type of conflict, thus, puts little or no premium on political and economic reform programs; the key to counterinsurgency success in ethnic civil war is represented by control of the contested territory, because the belligerents can recruit from their ethnic pools only from territory that they control. The enemy population is either expelled from an area that the incumbent holds, put into de facto concentration camps where it can be easily controlled, or exterminated. Attrition can work, because there is no risk of antagonizing a potentially supportive population: the enemy population would not support the government regardless of its actions, while accidental killing of co-ethnics would not cause defection.

This case study of the effects of mass killing in the Sudanese civil war is relevant to these debates in two respects. First, by identifying conditions under which mass killing may be successful this paper contributes to the discussion between advocates of “hearts and minds” and proponents of more aggressive approaches to counterinsurgency. Second, by trying to see whether mass killing’s effects on rebel capabilities and the population’s willingness to fight work at cross-purposes (i.e., whether, on the one hand, mass killing attrites the insurgency’s fighting power and, on the other hand, radicalizes the rebel civilian base of support) this paper contributes to the debates on the causal mechanisms through which civilian victimization operates and on whether ethnic civil war dynamics are inherently different from those that characterize ideological civil wars.

3. History of the Second North-South Sudanese War

Sudan’s second civil war started in 1983, when then President Nimeiri reneged on the Addis Abeba Accords (1972), which had ended the previous nine-year civil war (1963-1972) between Sudan’s northern Arabs and southern Christians and animists. Nimeiri, who had negotiated the agreement, probably reversed his position because of the need to appease northern anti-settlement Islamists on

whose support his authority had come to depend.²³ Southern military units responded by launching a guerrilla campaign.

In early 1983, southern military forces garrisoned in the town of Bor refused to obey the central government's order – which violated the peace agreement – to redeploy to the North. A series of garrisons in the South deserted following the Bor example, moving to Ethiopia to reorganize militarily. Desertions were also spurred by the fact that in June 1983 Khartoum carved the South in three powerless administrative provinces, thus revoking the regional autonomy granted by the peace agreement. Moreover, in September 1983 the government – again in violation of the Addis Abeba agreement – imposed Islamic law (sharia) on the entire territory of Sudan, including the mostly Christian and animist South.²⁴ The deserters, together with rebels from the previous conflict that had never given up their weapons following the peace agreement, formed a new guerrilla organization – the Sudan People Liberation Movement/Army (henceforth, for brevity, SPLA). The SPLA was led by John Garang – a former army officer – and framed its objectives in terms of transformation of Sudan into a secular and democratic state rather than secession for the South.²⁵

3.1 *The early stages of the war (1983-1986)*

The first clashes between SPLA and government forces occurred in late 1983, mostly along the border with Ethiopia. In this initial phase the SPLA resorted primarily to hit-and-run attacks, aiming at inflicting losses on government forces and capturing their equipment, without trying to hold territory. The SPLA focused its recruitment efforts mostly on the Dinka and Nuer populations (both Nilotic) of Bahr al-Ghazal and Upper Nile regions (see map in the Appendix); by contrast, the

²³ Pierre M. Atlas and Roy Licklider, "Conflict Among Former Allies After Civil War Settlement: Sudan, Zimbabwe, Chad, and Lebanon," *Journal of Peace Research* 36, no. 1, 1999 (January), pp.35-54; Francis M. Deng, *War of Visions: Conflict of Identities in the Sudan*, Brookings Institution, Washington DC, 1995 (chap. 11).

²⁴ These specific developments occurred in a general context of southerners' bitterness for Khartoum's decision to refine in the North the oil extracted in the South and to export it via the distant Port Sudan. In addition, southern army units had become resentful of northern forces' harsh treatment of southern civilians.

²⁵ Abel Alier, *Southern Sudan: Too Many Agreements Dishonoured*, Ithaca Press, Reading, 1992, p. 224; Douglas H. Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2006, pp. 61-65; Ann Mosely Lesch, *The Sudan: Contested National Identities*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1998, p. 55.

rebels did not receive substantial support from the population of Equatoria, which perceived the organization as a Dinka army.²⁶ By the end of 1985, the SPLA strengthened its position by taking over the towns of Boma and Yirol; Bahr al-Ghazal and Upper Nile continued to be its main recruiting areas, while its supply and training centres were still located across the border in Ethiopia.²⁷

In the course of the war the SPLA experienced a series of internal splits, which proved a serious drain on its strength. The first division occurred in 1983 between the new elements of the SPLA (led by John Garang) and the veterans from the previous civil war – known as Anyanya-II. Originally the product of leaders' personality differences and ideological disagreements (Anyanya-II favoured a self-determination agenda for the South), the split acquired an ethnic dimension by the end of 1984, because Anyanya-II fighters were mostly Nuer, while the SPLA continued to be primarily a Dinka and Nuer force. Starting from late 1984, Khartoum provided military support to Anyanya-II. The two southern forces often fought each other indirectly by targeting the populations supporting their rival; in addition, Anyanya-II's launched interdiction operations on SPLA's supply lines between Ethiopia and Bahr al-Ghazal, which were especially harmful to Garang's war effort against the government.²⁸

In 1985 a popular uprising in Khartoum, fuelled by economic difficulties and political repression, prompted the army to depose Nimeiri. The government that emerged from the 1986 elections, led by Sadiq al-Mahdi, put additional emphasis on the objective of the creation of an Islamic state and the related Arabization and Islamization of the South.²⁹

In 1986 the government was in a strong international position: Khartoum was receiving political support and military aid from the United States; it had developed a friendly relationship

²⁶ In January 1985, rebel units infiltrated this region but mistreated civilians already known not to be sympathetic to the SPLA; the rebels were eventually repelled by a combination of government forces and armed Equatorian civilians (Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, pp. 69-70).

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, 65-69; Robert O. Collins, *A History of Modern Sudan*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008, p. 154.

²⁹ Johnson 2006, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, pp. 70-73.

with neighbouring Libya; and it had managed to rally on its side the Gulf States by presenting the civil war as a struggle for the defence of Islam and Arabism.³⁰ However, al-Mahdi's government had only weak support within the Sudanese army's officer corps and thus was forced to rely on militias to conduct a substantial portion of the fighting. The militias' tactics focused on targeting populations thought to be supporting the rebels, burning villages and crops, killing and abducting civilians and stealing livestock. The militias were drawn both from southern tribes and from Arab tribes in Darfur and Kordofan, the latter being by far more destructive. In 1985 and 1986 the SPLA also brutally targeted civilian populations supporting southern militias allied with the government.³¹

3.2 SPLA's military successes (1987-1990)

In 1987 the SPLA adopted a new approach to the threat posed by the Arab militias. It started directly opposing raids against the civilian population and defeated government forces and Arab militias in a series of clashes. By 1989 the SPLA was able to seal most of the border separating the South from Darfur and Kordofan, thus substantially reducing Arab militias' infiltrations. In 1987 the SPLA also adopted a new, "softer" strategy to deal with local militias and the South's rural population. In particular, in Bahr al-Ghazal and Jonglei the rebels regularized their re-supply system by imposing an in-kind tax, which generally freed the population from arbitrary seizures. The SPLA's effort to improve its image among the population contrasted with the government's approach, which continued to attack civilians' dwellings once the rebels vacated an area. Throughout 1987 and 1988, the level of popular support enjoyed by the rebels increased; in 1988 and 1989 the SPLA was able to win over to its side a series of local militias (most importantly the

³⁰ In the first years of the war the United States supported Khartoum following the Cold War logic of "helping the enemy of your enemy" – Khartoum was opposed to Libya (in the first two years of the conflict) and Ethiopia. US support for Sudan declined in the late 1980s, when Khartoum established closer ties to Libya and Iran and its human rights abuses became more conspicuous. US military and economic aid was completely terminated in 1990 following the coup that brought to power the current President Omar al-Bashir (Herman J. Cohen, *Intervening in Africa: Superpower Peacemaking in a Troubled Continent*, Gordonsville, Palgrave Macmillan.2000, p. 65).

³¹ Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, pp. 81-83.

bulk of Anyanya-II forces in Upper Nile and Jonglei in 1988). As the SPLA widened its ethnic base, its image as a Dinka army partially faded.³²

The years 1987-1990 witnessed the emergence of a substantial rebel military advantage. In 1987 the SPLA took the war outside the South into northern territory, by launching a series of operations in Blue Nile, Kordofan and Darfur, and temporarily occupying two northern towns along the Ethiopian border. The rapprochement with Anyanya-II secured the SPLA's supply lines and substantially increased its ability to move troops throughout the South and concentrate them against government garrisons. In 1989 the rebels achieved a long series of victories: by June they had secured the southern frontier with Ethiopia, controlled a stretch of land from the border with Ethiopia to Bahr al-Ghazal and held three provincial capitals. The government experienced serious difficulties in supplying its isolated garrisons in the South.³³

In early 1989, in a context of widespread dissatisfaction with the government's domestic and international policies, and in particular with the unsuccessful war effort, the Sudanese army pressured al-Mahdi to start serious negotiations with the rebels. The country's dire economic situation, characterized by rampant inflation and serious difficulties in servicing international debt (with the United States about to end its assistance because of Khartoum's delays in its loan repayments), made the need for a negotiated settlement appear especially urgent. Al-Mahdi responded by offering the SPLA a suspension of Islamic law and the organization of a constitutional conference to create a more democratic political system; the fundamentalist National Islamic Front (NIF) left the government coalition in protest against the weakening of sharia. In May Khartoum and the SPLA reached a month-to-month ceasefire agreement to permit the delivery of humanitarian supplies. The government welcomed the ceasefire because it would halt the SPLA's

³² Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, pp. 82-84; Collins, *A History of Modern Sudan*, pp. 171, 201. The SPLA's estimated strength went from 3,000 fighters in 1984 to 20,000 in 1988, 30,000 in 1989 and 55,000 in 1990 (International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance*, International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 1984, 1988, 1989, 1990; SIPRI, *SIPRI Yearbook: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*, Humanities Press, New York, 1987, 1990, 1991), due to the continuous training of voluntary recruits in the SPLA's camps in Ethiopia.

³³ Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, p. 84; Collins, *A History of Modern Sudan*, p. 177.

rapid advances. For their part, the rebels were ready for a ceasefire because of a pressing need for food supplies in the areas under their control. In June the NIF and a group of devout army officers – led by Omar al-Bashir – staged a coup pre-empting peace negotiations between Garang and al-Mahdi, scheduled to meet shortly after the day of the coup.³⁴

In 1990 and early 1991, Khartoum's diplomatic and military position was further weakened because its support for Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War caused a drastic deterioration of relations with the Gulf States and the United States.³⁵ Conversely, the SPLA enjoyed an improvement in its international image and obtained new sources of supplies and weapons (in particular from Namibia and some of the former Front Line States of southern Africa). The series of rebel military successes continued: in November 1990 the SPLA made substantial advances towards the regional capital Juba and took control of the whole of Western Equatoria; in addition, the rebels concluded peace deals with militias from western Bahr al-Ghazal and with the Arab militias from Darfur and Kordofan, eager to regain access to the dry season pastures that the SPLA had denied them.³⁶

The NIF's coup did not bring about an end to the efforts to find a negotiated settlement to the conflict; diplomatic contacts between the belligerents continued amidst clashes on the battlefield. The main stumbling block was the issue of Islamic law: the SPLA's nonnegotiable demand was the rejection of sharia and the establishment of a secular state, while the government thought acceding to this ultimatum would be tantamount to political suicide. Overall, this phase of diplomatic contacts revealed a tendency for the winning side – the SPLA – to advance intransigent demands and be reluctant to initiate serious negotiations and for the losing side – Khartoum – to express genuine interest in halting the fighting and willingness to make concessions.³⁷

³⁴ Cohen, *Intervening in Africa*, pp. 61-62; Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, pp. 84-85.

³⁵ In addition, Iraq was no longer able to provide military aid to Sudan. Khartoum's relations with the United States (which, as noted, had already terminated its military aid to Sudan) were also negatively affected by Sudan's opposition to the free flow of humanitarian supplies to the South and its closer ties with Iran.

³⁶ Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, p. 85.

³⁷ Cohen, *Intervening in Africa*, pp. 68-75.

3.3 *The government strikes back (1991-1994)*

The SPLA's momentum suddenly ended in the spring of 1991. The fall of Mengistu's regime in Ethiopia in May 1991 led to the expulsion of Sudanese refugees and SPLA fighters: the rebels suddenly lost protected bases and sources of supplies.³⁸ In addition, in August another split occurred within the SPLA, with the emergence of a new faction – SPLA-Nasir – based in the Upper Nile region and mostly consisting of ethnic Nuer. The government provided military support to the SPLA-Nasir against Garang's group. The ensuing fighting between the two southern forces led to large-scale violence against both Dinka and Nuer populations. After initial successes, the SPLA-Nasir proved unable to make substantial headways against Garang's forces: the military support that the new faction was receiving from Khartoum and its indiscriminate violence against civilians radically reduced its popularity among the southern population, as well as alienating the international community, which had initially been sympathetic to it. The weakening of the SPLA-Nasir made it completely dependent on the support of the Sudanese army for its survival.³⁹

The fall of Mengistu and the SPLA's split strengthened Khartoum's position on the battlefield: by July 1992 government forces had conquered large areas in Jonglei and Eastern Equatoria.⁴⁰ Khartoum started seeing military victory as a concrete possibility and consequently abandoned its previous focus on a negotiated solution to the war. Thus, while Garang, for the first time, expressed willingness to hold personal talks with al-Bashir, the Sudanese President, who had up to that point insisted on direct talks with the SPLA's leader, declared himself in favour of initial lower-level negotiations. The government's attitude towards US mediation changed in the same direction: a month after having begged the United States to take an active role, Khartoum declared that there was no need for US involvement in the negotiations.⁴¹

³⁸ Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, p. 88; Collins, *A History of Modern Sudan*, pp. 203-205.

³⁹ Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, pp. 97-99; Collins, *A History of Modern Sudan*, pp. 202-206.

⁴⁰ Collins, *A History of Modern Sudan*, pp. 206-207. SPLA-Nasir granted Khartoum free passage through the areas it controlled in Upper Nile, so that the government forces could directly attack SPLA's centers in Eastern Equatoria and Jonglei.

⁴¹ Cohen, *Intervening in Africa*, pp. 79-80. The government, the SPLA and the SPLA-Nasir attended talks convened in Abuja, Nigeria, from 26 May to 4 June 1992. The government adopted an intransigent bargaining position because of its

In late 1992 and early 1993 there was no major government offensive to capitalize on the successes of the previous summer, because the ongoing US intervention in Somalia made Khartoum wary of the possible enforcement of a no-fly zone over southern Sudan. Thus much of the violence in this period consisted of small army and militia raids from areas recaptured by the government against civilians in territory held by the SPLA. Khartoum launched a major offensive the following winter, with the objective of reaching and sealing off the border with Uganda. The government did not completely achieve that goal but made substantial gains in Equatoria; the SPLA's defensive efforts were seriously hampered by logistical difficulties caused by the Lord Resistance Army – a Ugandan rebel organization allied with Khartoum – which disrupted SPLA's supply flows from Uganda.⁴²

3.4 The SPLA's counterattack (1995-1998)

The years 1994 and 1995 witnessed a gradual reversal of the government's momentum. Negotiations sponsored by the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD – bringing together Kenya, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Uganda) contributed to create a diplomatic climate more favourable to the SPLA, while continued international isolation was seriously weakening Khartoum.⁴³ Perhaps most important for battlefield developments was the fact that Khartoum squandered the political capital that it had accumulated supporting the victorious Ethiopian and Eritrean rebels with its policy of fostering Islamic revolution abroad, entailing the support of

military successes and the negotiations stalled (International Crisis Group, "God, Oil, Country: Changing the Logic of War in Sudan," *Africa Report* no. 39, 2002, pp. 16-17).

⁴² Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, p. 100.

⁴³ In 1990 the International Monetary Fund had declared Sudan "non-cooperating" in repaying its international debts; in 1992 the oil giant Chevron had sold its oil interests in the country; and in 1993 the State Department had included Sudan in the list of countries believed to be sponsoring terrorism. The Clinton Administration policy towards Sudan over time shifted from the constructive engagement of the Bush years to isolation of Khartoum, with the 1997 imposition of comprehensive economic sanctions and the closure of the US embassy in Khartoum the following year (Cohen, *Intervening in Africa*, pp. 85-86). The US position was influenced by the Clinton Administration's support for the new governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea, which Khartoum was trying to destabilize. In addition, Khartoum's association to Osama bin Laden, Hamas, Iraq and Iran as well as pressure exercised by US lobbies (in particular, African-American anti-slavery and Christian activists) probably played an important role in redirecting US policy. Khartoum was also plagued by internal tensions between the army and the Popular Defence Forces (PDF), an Islamist paramilitary organization created by al-Bashir in 1989 (Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, pp. 100-103; 162).

Islamist groups in the two neighbouring countries. By 1995 Ethiopia, Eritrea and Uganda were providing the SPLA with substantial political and military support.⁴⁴ In addition, the SPLA's military strength increased following the rapprochement between Garang and SPLA-Nasir forces operating in Eastern Equatoria and defection to the SPLA's side of militias near Juba and in the Nuba Mountains.⁴⁵

In 1995 the SPLA launched its first major offensive since the loss of its bases in Ethiopia. By March 1996, following a series of victories, the rebels had rolled back government forces to where they were prior to their 1992 advances in Eastern Equatoria.⁴⁶ SPLA's military successes continued the following year: the rebels retook two towns on the Ethiopian border, made substantial advances towards Juba and repelled government thrusts in Equatoria, Blue Nile and Nuba Mountains.⁴⁷ In July 1997, under heavy military attack and sustained diplomatic pressure, the government accepted to negotiate on the basis of the IGAD Declaration of Principles (which it had rejected in 1994), establishing the right for the South to decide, through a referendum, between regional self-determination and unity within a secular state.⁴⁸

3.5 The emergence of a new equilibrium and final negotiations (1999-2005)

In the years 1999-2001 yet another change occurred in the military balance between the government and the SPLA. In 1999 Sudan started producing and exporting oil, which significantly reduced Khartoum's international isolation. The opening of oil fields pushed some European governments to

⁴⁴ Sudan's meddling in Eritrean and Ethiopian internal affairs alienated the two governments, which consequently began to help the SPLA. At the end of 1993 Eritrea declared itself under attack by foreign Islamist forces (an implicit reference to Khartoum's support to domestic extremist groups), while Ethiopia was convinced that Khartoum represented a threat by the 1995 failed assassination attempt on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak visiting Addis Abeba. In March 1995, Khartoum's forces bombed Ugandan territory, which led to the cessation of diplomatic relations between the two countries and an increase in Uganda's support to the SPLA.

⁴⁵ Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, pp. 102-103, Collins, *A Modern History of Sudan*, pp. 210-211.

⁴⁶ In 1996 the United States sent to the SPLA about \$20 million worth of military equipment through Ethiopia, Eritrea and Uganda ("John Garang," *The Times*, August 2, 2005). This and subsequent provision of US covert military aid may have contributed to SPLA's successes on the battlefield, but there is not enough evidence to advance any firm conclusion on this issue.

⁴⁷ Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, p. 122. Increasing political and military cohesion within the National Democratic Alliance (an umbrella of southern and northern opposition groups created in 1989 and in which Garang's group constituted by far the strongest military component) also probably contributed to rebel successes.

⁴⁸ International Crisis Group, "God, Oil, Country," p. 20.

adopt a friendlier attitude towards Khartoum and brought about deeper economic ties with China and Malaysia. Oil exports also directly impacted Khartoum's military performance, by increasing the financial resources at its disposal to acquire new and more destructive weapons and sustain its troops on the field.⁴⁹ In addition, Khartoum's cooperation with US counter-terrorism efforts (in particular after the September 11th attacks) determined a substantial improvement of its relations with Washington.⁵⁰

On the other hand, regional military support for the SPLA almost dried up in the late 1990s, as Ethiopia and Eritrea went to war against each other and Uganda was drawn into the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In addition, Sudan's new status as oil-exporter increased its neighbors' interest in establishing friendly relationships. In 1999, Sudan and Ethiopia signed an agreement to stop supporting each other's rebel movements; in the same year, Khartoum resumed diplomatic relations with Uganda and Eritrea.⁵¹ Regional military support for the SPLA did not completely end, but was substantially curtailed: Ethiopia continued to grant the SPLA access to its territory, but through a much narrower section of the border; Eritrea kept providing some intermittent support to the SPLA and other Sudanese opposition groups; bilateral agreements between Khartoum and Kampala significantly reduced the SPLA's ability to mount attacks on government garrisons in Eastern Equatoria.⁵²

This phase of the war was not characterized by a clear military preponderance of one the two sides. Both launched offensive and counteroffensive operations in 1999 and 2000, without achieving a clear upper hand.⁵³ In 2001 and 2002, SPLA attacks focused on oilfields and related infrastructure (in particular in western Upper Nile), with the objective of preventing expansion of drilling and damaging existing infrastructure. The strategic logic of this SPLA's campaign seems to

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 102; Collins, *A History of Modern Sudan*, pp. 250-253. Sudan's arms imports (at constant 1990 prices) increased from \$98 million in 1995-1998 to \$239 million in 1999-2002 (SIPRI, *SIPRI Yearbook*, 2000, p. 369 and 2004, p. 476).

⁵⁰ Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, p. 107.

⁵¹ Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, pp. 214-215.

⁵² International Crisis Group, "Dialogue or Destruction? Organising for Peace as the War in Sudan Escalates," *Africa Report* no. 48, 2002, pp. 56-60; Collins, *A History of Modern Sudan*, p. 252.

⁵³ Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, pp. 213-217.

have been to inflict enough material damage and human suffering to convince foreign oil companies that their operations in Sudan were too costly, thus weakening Khartoum's war effort. The government, on the other hand, resorted to scorched-earth tactics to displace populations residing around existing and potential oil fields, thus making these areas more defensible.⁵⁴ In the course of 2002, the SPLA achieved an increase in the manpower at its disposal due its reunification with the main elements of SPLA-Nasir. Weak logistics, however, remained a significant constraint to the rebels' ability to support large number of troops in the remote areas where the oilfields are, especially during the rainy season.⁵⁵

The IGAD negotiation process (including the United States, the United Kingdom and Norway as observers) continued in parallel with military operations. In July 2002, a major breakthrough occurred, as Garang and al-Bashir signed the Machakos Protocol, a framework accord defining general procedures for further negotiations and establishing the principles of the South's right to a self-determination referendum and the preservation of sharia law in the North.

In October 2003, after having overcome a negotiating deadlock that seemed to threaten the entire peace process, the SPLA and the government, with the strong engagement of the United States, concluded a key agreement on the security provisions for peace settlement, including procedures for the disengagement of the two armed forces and plans for their eventual integration should the South opt to remain part of Sudan. In January 2004 another important turning point was reached, with the signing of a resource-sharing agreement, establishing a 50-50 oil-sharing formula between the North and the South for the oil produced in the South. Negotiations continued throughout 2004, leading to the conclusion of protocols granting special status to three disputed territories between the North and the South (Blue Nile, the Nuba Mountains and Abyei) and containing detailed power-sharing provisions. The final peace agreement, containing the six

⁵⁴ International Crisis Group, "God, Oil, Country," pp. 136-137.

⁵⁵ International Crisis Group, "Dialogue or Destruction?", p. 6.

protocols concluded since the fall of 2004 – known as the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) – was signed in January 2005.⁵⁶

4. Khartoum's Mass Killing Strategy

Overall, the second Sudanese civil war presents the basic characteristics of guerrilla warfare: a lack of clearly defined battle lines, with the insurgents often operating in the rear of government forces; the rebels' primary reliance on small and lightly armed units; a tendency for the guerrillas to avoid decisive set-piece battles and resort, instead, to hit-and-run attacks to impose high military, political and economic costs on the incumbent; the insurgents' direct reliance on the local population for man-power, food, supplies, shelter and intelligence.⁵⁷

In the course of the war some areas in the South repeatedly switched hands between the belligerents; however, the government's hold tended to be limited to a series of garrisons in major towns, while the SPLA controlled other towns and large part of the countryside. Khartoum and the SPLA did launch quasi-conventional large-scale offensives to take over enemy-held territory; however, much of the violence took the form of government's devastating raids on civilians and their livelihoods in areas controlled by the rebels and SPLA's interdiction operations on government's supply lines and, increasingly towards the end of the war, oil infrastructure.⁵⁸

The government's response to the insurgency presents the three elements of Valentino's "counterguerrilla mass killing": (1) direct targeting of civilians with the objective of terrorizing and intimidating guerrillas' supporters; (2) forced population resettlement, aimed at separating the insurgents from their civilian base of support by moving large segments of the population to areas under government control; and (3) scorched-earth, tactics, intended as the systematic destruction of

⁵⁶ Economist Intelligence Unit, "Sudan Country Profile 2005," 2005, pp. 10-14. Khartoum and the SPLA also invited the UN to deploy a peacekeeping force to monitor and support the implementation of the CPA.

⁵⁷ Benjamin A. Valentino, *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the 20th Century*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2004, p. 197.

⁵⁸ As noted above in section 3.1, the SPLA too indiscriminately targeted populations from which government-sponsored militias were drawn, but the rebels' resort to these tactics was mostly limited to the initial phases of the war (1983-1987) and occurred on a much smaller scale.

crops, livestock and dwellings in areas of guerrilla activity, with the objectives of discouraging civilian cooperation with the rebels, reducing the insurgents' physical ability to continue their operations and facilitating population resettlement efforts.⁵⁹ In addition, Khartoum attempted to interdict SPLA's supply lines from outside the country.

The government's targeting of civilians appears to have generally been indiscriminate, aiming at the devastation of villages under rebel control and the decimation of groups known to be sympathetic to the SPLA, rather than trying to strike on specific individuals collaborating with the guerrillas.⁶⁰ The government's campaign was undoubtedly effective at the *tactical* level: it is generally estimated that two million people lost their lives (mostly southerners) due to direct violence as well as starvation and disease caused by the conflict, while four million people were displaced within Sudan (in large part to the Khartoum area) and over 400,000 escaped to neighbouring countries.⁶¹

It should be noted that civilian targeting, scorched-earth and depopulation tactics could also be interpreted as an attempt by Khartoum and its militia allies to simply eliminate and expel southern groups (in particular Dinka and Nuer) or to dispossess them of resources, in particular grazing land and, in the late phases of the conflict, oil. Thus, the government's campaign against the South's population could also fit either the "ethnic" or "territorial" variant of another typology of mass killing proposed by Valentino – "dispossessive mass killing".⁶² However, counterinsurgency and dispossessive mass killing should not necessarily be seen as mutually exclusive.⁶³ That the main government's motivation was defeating the insurgency, in any case, is suggested by the timing of

⁵⁹ Valentino, *Final Solutions*, pp. 200-205. For a brief summary of the patterns of violence against civilians and between the belligerents, see International Crisis Group, "God, Oil, Country," pp. 116, 120-121.

⁶⁰ This is of course not to say that targeting killing also occurred during the civil war; but

⁶¹ Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), "In-depth: Internal Displacement – Sudan," 2002 (available at <http://www.irinnews.org/InDepthMain.aspx?InDepthId=41&ReportId=71000&Country=Yes>, accessed on April 16, 2010); United States Committee for Refugees, "USCR World Refugee Survey 2001," 2001. Valentino (*Final Solutions*, p. 83) reports a lower death toll – 1-1.5 million.

⁶² Valentino, *Final Solutions*, pp. 75-80.

⁶³ Valentino discusses several cases in which the counterinsurgency objective coexisted with other motives and he codes the Sudanese case as a primarily counterinsurgency mass killing with an additional ethnic motive; *ibid.*, p 83.

the violence (the mass killing campaign started only after the beginning of the rebellion) and its geographical pattern (villages thought to be supporting the rebels were especially targeted).⁶⁴

However, it is plausible that the militias to which Khartoum “outsourced” a large part of its counterinsurgency campaign were primarily engaged in dispossessive mass killing, motivated by their historical enmity with the Dinka and the Nuer, a consequence of competition over grazing land and meat trade as well as grievances of political marginalization vis-à-vis the Nilotic groups.⁶⁵ In addition, with the beginning of Sudan’s oil production and export in 1999, the counterinsurgency and dispossessive uses of mass killing became more closely intertwined: the depopulation of areas surrounding the oil fields became a way of protecting oil infrastructure from SPLA attacks (with oil being a crucial source of revenues to pay for the war’s costs) and at the same time a way to expand Khartoum’s territorial control into the oil-rich South, so as to establish a *fait accompli* to be eventually taken into account at the negotiating table.

Khartoum’s approach to the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the South was consistent with its overall counterinsurgency strategy. In the first years of the war the government was able to convince the United States, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the World Food Program not to cooperate with the SPLA and limit relief operations in the South to government-held areas. An important change occurred in 1988 with the launch of a massive international relief effort called Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS). Under international pressure and increasing domestic demands for a negotiated settlement of the war, Khartoum started allowing humanitarian flows to rebel territory but it kept manipulating aid, by strongly limiting permitted quantities and diverting supplies to government controlled areas (Khartoum’s assent to aid flows to SPLA-held areas was generally conditional on delivery of far greater quantities to often unassessed populations under government

⁶⁴ Khartoum resorted to civilian targeting from the beginning of the war; however, this approach seems to have become more systematic in 1987, following the decision of the newly appointed minister of defense to unleash militias from Kordofan and Darfur against African villages in Bahr al-Gazal and Upper Nile in order to reverse the tide of rebel advances by weakening the SPLA’s base of support; see Collins, *A History of Modern Sudan*, p. 174. Khartoum occasionally was quite explicit about its strategic logic; for example, in 1989 Hassan Al-Turabi, an influential member of the government, declared that “the more people die or flee the South, the weaker the SPLA becomes” (“Starvation as a Political Weapon,” *US News and World Report*, 6 February, 1989).

⁶⁵ Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan’s Civil Wars*, pp. 67-69.

control). Following the 1991 SPLA split, Khartoum allowed broad access to the areas held by the SPLA-Nasir, while maintaining restrictions to the areas controlled by Garang's faction.⁶⁶ Thus, although at first sight letting humanitarian supplies reach populations under SPLA's control would seem to undermine the government's goal of draining the rebels' resources, on a closer examination Khartoum's response made strategic sense: it helped to mitigate international pressures (and perhaps stave off a more forceful intervention), while allowing the government, through continued obstruction and diversion of supplies, to minimize the rebels' gains from aid and possibly even experience a net increase in relative strength.

5. The Impact of Mass Killing on the War Outcome

This section assesses the effects of mass killing on the belligerents' progress on the battlefield and on the ultimate outcome of the war, adopting a combination of within-case congruence procedure and process tracing.⁶⁷ From our previous discussion of the literature it is possible to identify three mechanisms (not necessarily mutually exclusive) through which counterinsurgency mass killing could affect the war outcome:

(1) Attrition of rebel capabilities: the government's mass killing could deplete rebel resources within the theatre of operations to the point that the insurgents are materially unable of sustaining military operations or they realize resistance is hopeless and thus surrender. This mechanism, therefore, includes both a form of physical enforcement and coercion by denial.

(2) "Stoking the fire": the government's indiscriminate violence could swell the insurgency's ranks, by pushing fence-sitters to join the guerrillas and stiffening the resolve of people already involved in the fight.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp.146-150.

⁶⁷ Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1997, pp. 58-66. The process tracing component of my research design has the limit of relying almost exclusively on a "black-boxing" approach, explaining causal mechanisms on the basis of the observation of sequences of events and an implicit assumption of belligerents' strategic rationality, rather than testimonies of decision-makers explaining their actions.

(3) Coercion by punishment: the government's mass killing could inflict enough suffering on the population to push civilians into passivity or even turn them against the insurgents. As noted, the literature suggests that this effect is plausible if the rebel organization is too weak to protect the population.

Finally, a mechanism involving external actors rather than internal dynamics, not directly addressed in the literature discussed above, can be identified:

(4) Humanitarian intervention: the government's gross violation of humanitarian law could backfire by prompting powerful international actors to intervene in support of the insurgents with diplomatic and economic sanctions, military aid or actual use of force.

The question of mass killing's strategic effectiveness is addressed below from two different angles. Section 5.1 investigates whether a combination of attrition and the "stoking the fire" mechanism offers a convincing explanation for the pattern of alternating rebel and military successes described above; in addition, it discusses the potential secondary role played by the punishment mechanism. Section 5.2 examines the reasons why Khartoum finally accepted a negotiated settlement, with the objective of understanding whether mass killing eventually backfired by provoking an intensification of external (in particular US) pressure on the government to make concessions to the rebels.

5.1 Did mass killing affect progress on the battlefield?

Khartoum resorted to mass killing throughout the conflict (except for the very beginning of the war) and no discernible pattern of changing intensity of civilian victimization over time emerges.⁶⁸ Thus mass killing and significant developments on the battlefield – my dependent variable (DV) in this

⁶⁸ Detailed statistics on the number of civilian casualties per month or even year are not available, to the best of my knowledge. Even if they were, it is not clear that this information would be very useful for our purposes: my goal is to assess the impact of mass killing on developments on the battlefield and war outcomes, but an increased number of civilian casualties can be a consequence rather than the cause of the government's ability to take control of a given territory (see Downes, *Targeting Civilians in War*).

sub-section – do not covary.⁶⁹ However, it is possible to study the impact of mass killing by using the interaction between mass killing and the level of regional military support that the SPLA received, which did vary throughout the war, as independent variable (IV).

This approach allows us to see whether a theoretical argument combining attrition and the “stoking the fire” mechanism can explain the changes in our DV. According to this argument, government counterguerrilla mass killing can destroy rebel resources but at the same time tends to embitter the civilian population. If the rebels can replace, to a large extent, their losses from external sources and access safe havens across the border, mass killing will likely have a net negative impact on the government’s strength, because the depletion of rebel domestic resources cannot compensate for the swelling of the insurgency’s ranks due to the “stoking the fire” mechanism. By contrast, if the theatre of operations is isolated and mass killing can effectively reduce the rebel domestic resources, civilian targeting can have a net positive effect on the government’s military advances. If the argument is correct, one should expect to see a positive correlation between the level of external military support received by the rebels and their success on the battlefield. It should be noted that I am not presenting an argument on military external support to rebels as determinant of guerrilla warfare outcome. I focus on changes in regional support for the SPLA as an empirical stratagem to disentangle the different mechanisms of coercion, given that these changes in support levels can be considered as exogenous shocks on the government ability to destroy a sufficient highly share of the rebels’ resources.⁷⁰ In the remaining part of this section, I

⁶⁹ Progress on the battlefield is not the same as the final outcome of the conflict, the phenomenon that we are ultimately interested in; the two, however, can be seen as closely related. Even if civil wars are not won by “accumulating points” through a series of victorious battles, the ability of one belligerent to effectively control the entire territory under dispute is tantamount to victory and thus a tendency for one side to significantly expand its territorial control can be interpreted as a progress towards military victory. Of course, small-scale hit-and-run attacks can still be executed by one side in territory controlled by the adversary; judging whether this amounts to a continuation of the war would depend on the extent to which the residual violence can disrupt everyday civilian life (a standard threshold in quantitative studies of civil war for the definition of the phenomenon is at least 100 violent deaths per year; see Nicholas Sambanis, “What is Civil War?: Conceptual and Empirical Complexities of an Operational Definition,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 6, 2004 (December), pp. 814-858).

⁷⁰ I treat the changes in external military support as exogenous because the historical evidence referred to in section 3 above does not suggest the existence of problems of reverse causality or of omitted variables causing both the geo-political switches and battlefield developments.

show that an examination of the evidence reveals a picture consistent with the proposed theoretical argument.⁷¹

The government's brutal tactics seem to have been immediately effective in threatening the SPLA's base of support: the rebels had to react by organizing large movements of people into refugee camps in Ethiopia, where services, food and medical care could be provided and where new recruits could be trained. In addition, the fact that Anyanya-II's attacks on SPLA's supply lines from Ethiopia proved especially damaging to the organization's operations testifies to its large dependence on external sources of supply and to the government's ability to deny internal resources. However, in particular after the SPLA in 1987 adopted the strategy of protecting its civilian base against government attacks, with Ethiopia generously providing military support to the rebels, Khartoum's indiscriminate violence backfired: in the years 1987-1991 the SPLA's popularity increased, even among Equatorians (who had traditionally been hostile to Garang's Nilotic-dominated organization), and its fighting force went from 20,000 to 55,000 men.⁷²

In 1989 the SPLA controlled most of the South's territory and appeared proximate to victory. Khartoum's weak position was directly reflected in al-Mahdi's willingness to offer substantial concessions to the rebels to reach a negotiated settlement. Even the Islamist regime brought to power by the 1989 coup displayed an interest in a negotiated solution, given that its military situation was as difficult as its predecessor's.

However, in 1991 the SPLA's loss of Ethiopian safe havens and the interruption of material support from Mengistu caused a rapid change of the situation, weakening the rebels' position and correspondingly strengthening Khartoum's. The government launched a series of offensives, reconquering a large number of towns and villages by July 1992. The shift in military fortunes

⁷¹ It is important to note that the correlation between level of external support and belligerents' relative strength is far from being perfectly observable and measurable. Changes in level of support proxy variations in the government's ability to conduct coercion by denial; thus any change should be associated with a shift in the parties' relative strength, but this may be too small to be observable (think of a scenario in which regional support for the rebels goes from no support to, say, one ton of food per month; this change is unlikely to make a substantial difference under any circumstance).

⁷² The data on SPLA's size comes from International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance*, 1987-1990 and SIPRI, *SIPRI Yearbook*, 1988-1991.

corresponded to a toughening of Khartoum's negotiating position, which displayed much less willingness to make concessions than before.

The government's momentum ended in 1995, when the rebels launched their first offensive since 1991, recapturing large part of the territory lost in the meantime. This shift in relative military power followed another change, this time more gradual, in the levels of external military support enjoyed by the rebels, as Eritrea, Ethiopia and Uganda had re-started granting military aid and safe havens to the SPLA. As in 1991, developments on the battlefield were reflected in the actors' positions at the negotiating table, with Khartoum accepting in 1997 the principle of a referendum on southern self-determination, which it had rejected in 1994.

The third radical alteration of the military situation was also associated with a change in regional military support to the SPLA. In the years 1999-2001, Khartoum's relations with Eritrea, Ethiopia and Uganda improved significantly, leading to a substantial reduction in their military support for the rebels. As a consequence, the phase of SPLA's advances ended and a more balanced military situation between the two sides emerged. Unlike in the previous two episodes of changing levels of external support, this time a more balanced situation emerged; this is consistent with my argument, because the change in external support seems to have been less marked this time and thus we should expect a less strong effect on the DV.

Other factors likely contributed to this alternating pattern of government's and rebels' successes, in particular changes in diplomatic (as opposed to military) support for the two sides, the beginning of Sudan's oil production and the fact that some smaller southern forces switched sides between the SPLA and the government; these factors are not incompatible with the proposed causal mechanism and may be operating at the same time. The available evidence does not allow to disentangle the relative contribution of these factors to each of the three changes in our DV; but even taking into account these other influences the hypothesized correlation seems to hold: while a change in external military support precedes all of the three changes in military advances discussed above, none of the other factors can explain all the battlefield developments. In addition, the

patterns of re-alignments of southern factions seem to be in part endogenous to the level of external support enjoyed by the SPLA.

The improvement of the SPLA's international image and the corresponding isolation of the Sudanese Islamist regime (by 1995 abandoned by the United States, the Gulf States and its neighbors) plausibly contributed to the rebel successes in the years 1995-1998.⁷³ However, these diplomatic developments seem to have played a secondary role compared to regional military support for the rebels. In fact, US and the Gulf States' diplomatic support for Khartoum in the years 1987-1990 was not sufficient to turn the military tide in its favor; conversely, the fact that these states had turned their back to Khartoum as early as 1991 did not decisively impede its military successes in 1991-1994.⁷⁴

The beginning of oil production in 1999 was probably an important cause of the eventual reequilibration of military power between the belligerents. As noted, oil likely had both a direct and an indirect impact on the government's military position, allowing Khartoum to purchase more firepower and at the same time reduce its international isolation; however, obviously it did not affect previous battlefield developments.

The realignments of smaller southern forces represent the strongest challenge to the mechanism centred on the variation of regional military support, given that two of the three main switches (the 1991 split in SPLA's ranks and the 1995 SPLA's partial rapprochement with SPLA-Nasir) accompanied changes in battlefield trends (the 2002 SPLA's reunification with other important elements of SPLA-Nasir did not lead to a shift in the battlefield fortunes of the belligerents). However, the available evidence suggests that the 1991 split was, to an important extent, caused by the fall of Mengistu. By contrast, the 1995 realignment does not seem to have

⁷³ A possible mechanism would be: a more favorable diplomatic climate increases the levels of confidence of SPLA fighters and civilians in the prospects of victory, thus creating some sort of self-fulfilling prophecy.

⁷⁴ As noted earlier, the United States and the some Arab Gulf countries also provided military aid to Khartoum before 1990, but this aid does not appear to have been decisive for the same reasons of timing adduced concerning diplomatic support. The changes in the general diplomatic climate probably contributed to the shift in Sudan's neighbors' approach to the SPLA, but the latter was not simply a reflection of the former. Regional support for the SPLA re-started a few years after Khartoum's diplomatic abandonment by the United States and was due in large part to specific episodes of Sudanese meddling in their domestic affairs. On the other hand, US hostility towards Sudan was reinforced by Khartoum's behavior towards the new governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea.

been a consequence of changes in regional military support for the SPLA, but rather the product of SPLA-Nasir's internal divisions.⁷⁵

Several factors explain the background conditions of the 1991 split: ethnic tensions between the SPLA's central leadership (mostly Dinka) and the Nasir commanders (Nuer and Shilluk), ideological disagreements (the local leaders favoured independence rather than reform of a united Sudan) and the personal rivalries between Garang and the two Nasir leaders – Riek Machar and Lam Akol. However, the weakening of the SPLA due to the interruption of Ethiopian support was probably the immediate trigger of the split: it represented both an opportunity to challenge a weakened Garang⁷⁶ and a sensible response to the looming threat of a devastating government offensive.⁷⁷ The SPLA commanders in Nasir found themselves in a position of extreme vulnerability to a possibly imminent government offensive: the rebels had substantially less resources at their disposal and many more people to feed, given that the Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia had just been expelled to the Upper Nile; on the other hand, a government attack was particularly threatening given that it could have been launched from multiple directions, including the Ethiopian territory. Moreover, the local commanders probably thought that their chances of being rescued by other SPLA units were low, given the ongoing efforts to take Juba in Equatoria and personal tensions with Garang. In this context, the Nasir rebels announced their separation from the SPLA and reached an agreement with Khartoum, which offered them support against Garang's forces. This development can be explained in terms of the attrition mechanisms: the interruption of Ethiopian support reduced the risk of Garang's retaliation against defection and at the same time left the local rebels incapable of dealing with the consequences of previous government attacks and the anticipated consequences of continued bombing of refugees or a ground offensive; thus local rebel leaders sided with Khartoum.

⁷⁵ Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, pp. 114-126.

⁷⁶ Peter A. Nyaba, *Politics of Liberation in South Sudan: An Insider's View*, Fountain Publishers, Kampala, 1997, pp. 74-105. The author was directly involved in the plot against Garang's authority and cites the weakening of the SPLA due to the fall of Mengistu as key in generating a sense of opportunity in the defectors.

⁷⁷ Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, pp. 91-99.

In sum, the observed correlation between our IV and DV is consistent with a combination of the attrition and “stoking the fire” mechanisms: on the one hand, mass killing seems to alienate the civilian population; on the other hand, it substantially reduces the rebels’ ability to fight once the battlefield is isolated, so that external resources cannot be used to replace depleted domestic assets and the rebels do not have protected bases across the border. This pattern, by contrast, is not consistent with the punishment argument: if punishment were the main causal mechanism at play we would not expect success on the battlefield to correlate with changes in the availability of external resources; instead, one should see a tendency for Khartoum to become stronger over time as punishment accumulates and insurgents and/or the civilian population switch to the government side or there should be evidence of a threshold effect, whereby indiscriminate violence initially has the net effect of embittering the population but, after a certain level of devastation is reached, it becomes an effective tool of coercion.

It is of course possible that punishment operates in conjunction with the attrition effect. Punitive attacks may have induced compliance with authority when the government appeared strong because attrition was working, while stiffening popular resistance in moments in which the government appeared weak (the dynamic of the 1991 split is in part compatible with a punishment argument). In addition, there may be a positive feedback relationship between the two mechanisms, whereby effective attrition is a precondition for coercion by punishment, which in turn reinforces the attrition effect by diminishing the man-power resources available to the rebels. Thus the possibility that punishment had an important impact on the two sides’ battlefield performance cannot be ruled out with the available evidence; however, in any case attrition seems to have played an essential role, because punishment alone could not explain the alternating pattern of rebel and government successes, while attrition logically could operate independently from punishment.

5.2 Did mass killing eventually backfire by prompting humanitarian intervention?

So far I have not directly addressed the question of whether and how mass killing affected the ultimate negotiated outcome of the war. Mass killing evidently was not sufficient for Khartoum to decisively defeat the SPLA, but this observation does not say anything about whether mass killing eventually backfired by prompting international humanitarian intervention in support of the rebels.

As noted in section 3.5 above, the last phase of the war was characterized by a relatively balanced military situation between the belligerents. By the end of 2001, the government was unable to expand the number of its garrisons and establish control of the southern countryside, while the SPLA occasionally managed to move a sufficiently large number of troops to take government garrison-towns, but it experienced serious problems in maintaining its supply lines for long periods. Thus a frequent and indecisive alternation of government and rebel control over a handful of towns and villages occurred. However, a stalemate had probably not emerged; on the contrary, the potential for an eventual government “breakthrough” was apparent. Khartoum’s increasing oil revenues allowed it to continue to build up its arsenal of heavy weapons and its aircraft fleet, which would permit an intensification of the government’s efforts to retake rebel-held areas and protect oil fields by displacing local populations.⁷⁸

In 2002 several analysts argued that the only prospect for a negotiated settlement would be for Khartoum’s neighbours to offer the SPLA increased military and political support (which did not appear likely, given their rapprochement with Sudan), otherwise the rebels would be gradually ground down by the government’s superior resources.⁷⁹ Other observers pointed out that in 2002 neither side had concrete prospects of a military victory, because the SPLA, even if substantially weakened, maintained its ability to mount disruptive attacks on Sudan’s oil infrastructure.⁸⁰ Whether or not a government military victory was inevitable, it seems plausible that the SPLA’s leadership realized that, without a substantial change of attitude on the part of Sudan’s neighbours

⁷⁸ International Crisis Group, “God, Oil, Country,” p. 117.

⁷⁹ International Crisis Group, “Dialogue or Destruction?,” p. 7.

⁸⁰ See, for example, Economist Intelligence Unit, “Sudan Country Profile 2002,” 2002, pp. 6-7.

or a more forceful international intervention, its military position would deteriorate over time. If this interpretation is correct, it made sense for the rebels to reach a negotiated settlement sooner rather than later: postponing negotiations would entail a continuation of the high costs of fighting and the risk of a weaker bargaining position in the future.⁸¹

It is more difficult to explain Khartoum's decision to accept a negotiated settlement, given the realistic prospect of an improvement of its military position over time. The most plausible explanation is that Khartoum opted for a negotiated settlement *in spite* of the fact that an eventual total victory was not completely implausible, because the necessary concessions were less onerous than the anticipated future costs of fighting.⁸²

Beside the SPLA's ability (at least in the short term) to continue attacking Sudan's oil infrastructure, US economic sanctions probably figured prominently in Khartoum's cost-calculation, as suggested by the following sequence of events. In September 2001 the UN Security Council lifted diplomatic sanctions against Sudan, but the United States abstained from the vote and maintained its unilateral sanctions; in the same month the Bush Administration convinced the House of Representatives Republican leaders to withdraw draft legislation of the "Sudan Peace Act" banning foreign firms investing in Sudan's oil industry from participating in US capital markets, but the threat of these sanctions did not recede because a coalition of Christian and African American groups continued to lobby the government on this issue. This coalition dropped its support for capital market sanctions only in response to Khartoum's decision to sign the Machakos Protocol (July 2002). Nonetheless, the threat of new economic sanctions did not completely disappear, because a revised version of the "Sudan Peace Act" (signed into law in October 2002) gave President Bush the authority to adopt measures to deny Sudan access to oil revenues *if*

⁸¹ Francis M. Deng and J. Stephen Morrison, "US Policy to End Sudan's War: Report of the CSIS Task Force on US-Sudan Policy," CSIS, Washington, DC, 2001 (February); Collins, *A History of Modern Sudan*, pp. 261-262.

⁸² In this light, it would be inappropriate to interpret the negotiated outcome as a consequence of the emergence of a "hurting stalemate", as suggested by Herman Cohen (*Intervening in Africa*, p. 86). See Alan Kuperman, "Ripeness Revisited: The Perils of Muscular Mediation," in Terrence Lyons and Gilbert M. Khadiagala (eds.), *Conflict Management and African Politics: Ripeness, Bargaining, and Mediation*, Routledge, New York, for a theoretical and empirical critique of William Zartman's well-known argument that a "mutually hurting stalemate" is a necessary condition to end violent conflicts by negotiation. The beginning of the Darfur rebellion in the early 2003 may also have contributed to Khartoum's to end the North-South civil war, so as not fight two wars at the same time.

Khartoum did not pursue peace talks in good faith.⁸³ Colin Powell's October 2003 offer to lift economic sanctions against Sudan and to remove it from the list of states sponsoring terrorism if a final deal was signed seems to have made a decisive difference in convincing Khartoum to make oil-sharing concessions⁸⁴: a few weeks afterwards, in January 2004, Khartoum reverted its previous insistence on retaining 90 percent of all oil income and agreed to a 50-50 split of oil produced in the South.⁸⁵

At the same time, it is important to note that the final agreement, albeit entailing substantial concessions that Khartoum was recalcitrant to make, did not amount to a simple ratification of the SPLA's requests. Most importantly, the long-standing SPLA's objective of the creation of a secular Sudan was not included in the agreement. Thus the government did not have to make concessions on the application of the sharia in the North, which Nimeiri and al-Mahdi had considered extremely dangerous for their political survival and which would have been, arguably, even more costly for al-Bashir's Islamist government; by contrast, several members of the government had long seen self-determination for the South as negotiable.⁸⁶ However, the beginning of oil production, given that most of the oil fields are located in the South and in the disputed area of Abiey, may have altered the government's past willingness to let the South go. In this light, it is quite possible that Khartoum's calculation that a negotiated settlement was preferable to continued fighting was conditional on the South's eventual vote in favour of national unity in the CPA-mandated referendum scheduled for 2011. A renewal of the war if the South opts for independence does not appear implausible.

The mass killing campaign probably contributed to intensify US pressure on Khartoum to reach a negotiated settlement and in this sense it had undesired consequences for the government.

⁸³ Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, pp. 217-220.

⁸⁴ "Peace in Our Time", *The Economist*, vol. 369, issue 8347, October 25, 2003, p. 67.

⁸⁵ Economist Intelligence Unit, "Sudan Country Profile 2005," 2005, p.12. This explanation of Khartoum's reasoning finds some support in a November 2001 declaration by Sudan's Foreign Minister Mustafa Ismail: "We don't want to put the oil in jeopardy, so this is the right time to engage in the peace process" (International Crisis Group's interview in Khartoum, November 20, 2001, reported in International Crisis Group, "Oil, God, Country," p. 26).

⁸⁶ Cohen, *Intervening in Africa*, pp. 62, 70.

But this is not to say that on balance mass killing backfired: the threat of US sanctions did not make it physically impossible for Khartoum to keep fighting, but it simply raised the expected costs of continuation of the war to the point that it made sense for the government to accept a negotiated settlement. Figuring out whether resorting to mass killing was overall a good strategic choice for Khartoum requires answering a counterfactual question about what other counterinsurgency strategy could have been more effective. A systematic attempt to win the southern population's "hearts and minds" represents the clearest alternative to Khartoum's counterinsurgency mass killing. The problem is that in order to be effective this strategy requires very large numbers of disciplined troops, which Khartoum probably never had at its disposal.⁸⁷

This is not to say that Khartoum's approach to deal with the SPLA's threat was flawless. Our analysis suggests that sealing the country's borders should have been a key priority for the government and thus Khartoum should have made all possible diplomatic efforts to convince its neighbours not to support the rebels. In retrospect, Khartoum's most consequential strategic mistake was to antagonize Eritrea, Ethiopia and Uganda in 1993-1995, when it was clearly prevailing against an SPLA weakened by lack of regional support. In any case, isolation of the theatre of operations would not have eliminated the need to deal with the insurgent threat within Sudan and thus, given the troop constraints mentioned above, mass killing may still have represented Khartoum's best option to defeat the SPLA.

⁸⁷ The orthodox military view is that 20 troops per thousand of local population are likely to be necessary for stability operations in condition of high unrest (James T. Quinlivan, "Force Requirements in Stability Operations," *Parameters* 25, 1995 (Winter), pp. 59-69; see also US Army and the Marine Corps, *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*). Assuming a southern population of 8 million – the UN Found for Population Activities ("UNFPA Sudan Country Office: Southern Sudan", 2006) estimated it at 7.5-9.7 million in 2006 – 160,000 troops would have been required to reach the indicated force ratio. Khartoum's regular forces never approached this figure – the Sudanese armed forces gradually grew from 58,000 at the beginning of the conflict to a peak of 117,000 in 2001 (International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance*, 1983-2005). Khartoum also relied on militias and the paramilitary PDF, but their number of active-duty fighters was not sufficient to reach necessary force levels and in any case it is doubtful that these elements, more akin to warlords than professional soldiers, would have been of much use in a "hearts and minds" campaign. In addition, the South's large area (640,000 square kilometres, compared, for example, to Iraq's 440,000) and extremely poor transport infrastructure would have enormously complicated pacification efforts. Finally, the organization of large-scale civic action programs would have been a substantial drain on Khartoum's budget.

6. Conclusions

The main finding of this paper is that the effectiveness of Khartoum's mass killing counterinsurgency strategy depended on the level of military support that the rebels received from neighbouring countries. In the two phases of the war in which Sudan's neighbours provided substantial help to the rebels, the SPLA made rapid progress on the battlefield; by contrast, in the two phases in which regional aid dried up, the rebels appeared much weaker. Other factors also seem to have played an important role, in particular the realignments of minor southern rebel groups between the SPLA and Khartoum.

This evidence is overall consistent with my theoretical argument combining attrition and "stoking the fire" mechanisms: indiscriminate violence tends to embitter the civilian population but this effect can be more than compensated by attrition if the level of devastation inflicted on civilians and their livelihoods is very high and there is no outside support to replace or preserve the resources the rebels need to keep fighting.

Future studies will need to further specify the conditions under which counterinsurgency mass killing is more likely to work and explore the generalizability of the proposed causal mechanism. Here I can only present a few preliminary considerations on these issues. Several other cases suggest that geographical factors are likely to be important determinant of the incumbent's ability to attrite rebel domestic resources and isolate the theatre of operations: Britain's, the United States's and Italy's counterinsurgency mass killing in South Africa, the Philippines and Libya, respectively, significantly benefited from the fact that the theatre of operations was small and easy to isolate – the two Boer republics were tiny and surrounded by territory controlled by the British and hostile African tribes; the US campaign was fought on small islands; the Italians were able to cut off supply flows from Egypt to the relatively small region of Cyrenaica, where the insurgents

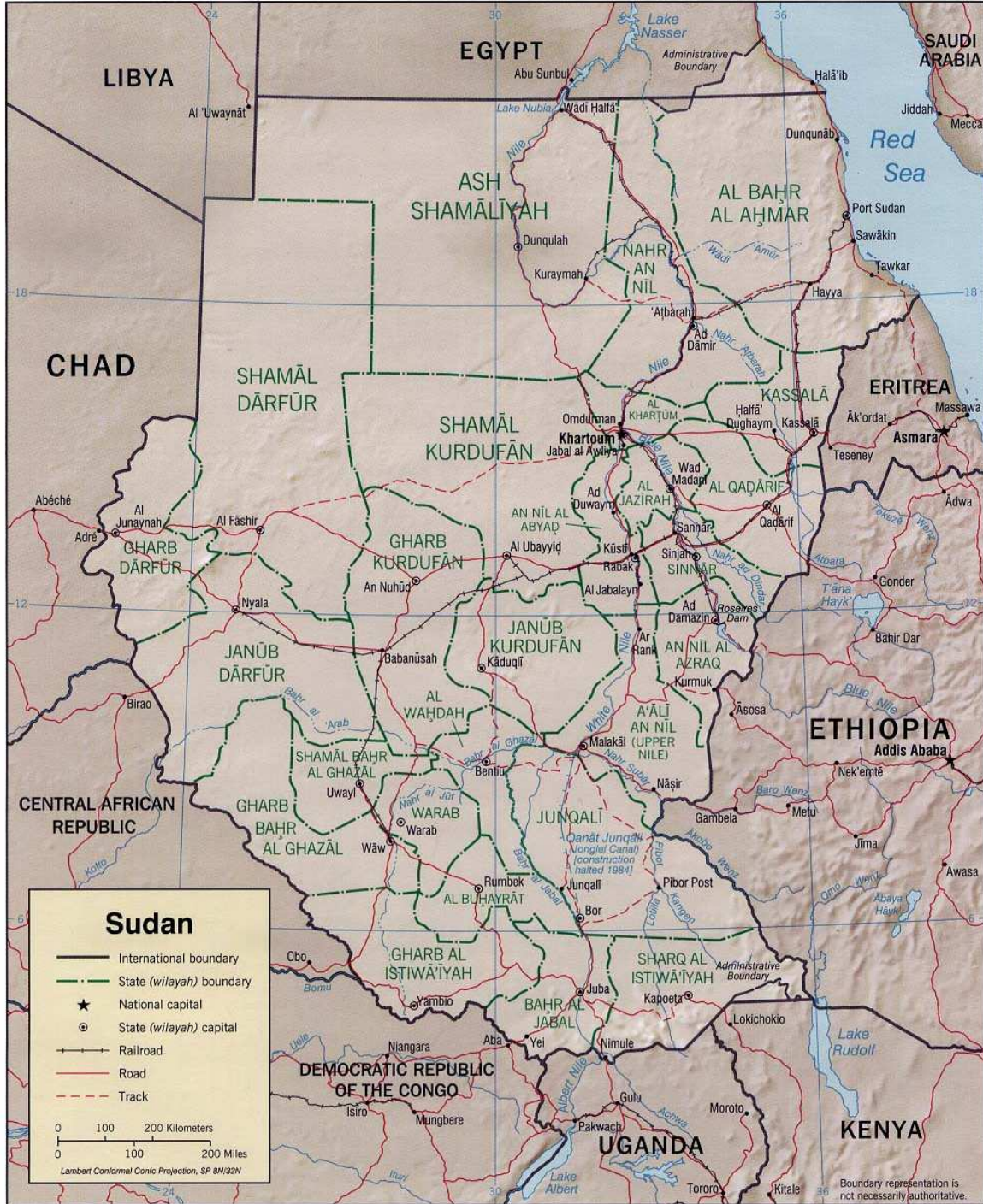
operated.⁸⁸ More recently, the geographical isolation of East Timor probably was an important cause of Indonesia's ability to suppress with mass killing the local insurgency for over twenty years.

This paper's focus on a single case of ethnic conflict does not allow us to directly address the question of whether mass killing can work in ideological civil wars. However, the record of counterinsurgency mass killing in the post-Second World War period suggests that this strategy may be less effective in ideological civil wars: Valentino and his co-authors identify four cases in which an incumbent resorting to counterinsurgency mass killing against an ethnic insurgency eventually won the war (China vs. Tibet – 1956-1959; Indonesia vs. East Timor – 1975-1988; Iraq vs. Kurds – 1961-1975 and 1985-1988), but no instance of successful counterinsurgency mass killing in an ideological civil war. A possible explanation for this finding is a different scope for the “stoking the fire” effect across the two types of conflict. As noted above, there is evidence that Khartoum's mass killing embittered the southern civilian population; in particular, government indiscriminate violence, when the rebels offered some form of protection, seems to have increased support for the SPLA among Nuer and Equatorian groups, which had been more diffident towards Garang's organization than the Dinka population. However, even in an extreme-case scenario in which indiscriminate ethnic violence alienates the entire “enemy” population (i.e., in our case, all the ethnic groups in the South), mass killing's attrition effect could lead to a net reduction in the insurgency's strength and eventually to the incumbent's victory, because the government could still enjoy the support of its ethnic constituency. By contrast, in ideological civil wars there is much more room for the “stoking the fire” mechanism to play a decisive role: in principle there is no limit for the tendency of indiscriminate violence to alienate civilians; if the near-totality of the population ends up siding with the rebels, the government will have inevitably lost.

⁸⁸ Downes, “Draining the Sea by Filling the Graves.”

Appendix:

Map of Sudan



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