

THE AFRO - ARAB CONFLICT IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The Racial and Religious Dimensions of the Sudanese Conflict and its Possible Ramifications in East, Central and Southern Africa in the Next Millennium¹.

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I. Background

Islam, as a religion as well as culture, is a major factor in the Sudanese conflict. This is related to its self-transmutation into a vehicle for the Arabization of the African people in the Sudan since the eleventh century. The current trends of Islamic revivalism (*tajdid*) and reformation (*islah*) spearheaded by the present National Islamic Front (NIF) government, and encapsulated in its political ideology and a cultural package dubbed as '*el tawajjat el hadharia*' (literally meaning an orientation towards Islamic civilization) is found in the promulgation of the Sudan's 1998 Islamic constitution. The introduction of this constitution has effectively made the country a *de jure* Islamic republic, with the strict and harsh application of the *Islamic Sharia* codes even against non-Muslims. These developments are all manifestations of the modern day attempts by the Arabs to reconquer Africa.

The NIF regime, a radical wing of a pan-Arab ideology, has elevated itself to the fiduciary of realising this Arab dream. First, as a minority political force in north Sudan, in order to save

a weak Arab government, it had to usurp the state in a military coup on June 30th, 1989. Since then it has thrived on war in South Sudan. It brands the Sudan People's Liberation Movement /Army (SPLM/A) as anti-Islamic and anti-Arab as bait for mobilising Arab and Muslim support worldwide. Its proclamation of *jihad* (holy war) against the SPLM/A was meant to draw into the war even the most liberal of the Muslims in the north. This has consequently changed the character of the conflict, making the religious dimension more conspicuous.

Secondly, the regime has promulgated and passed an Islamic Constitution, a religious platform it shares with the other northern political parties such as the Umma Party and the Democratic Unionist Party although now in opposition. The regime intends to pull the carpet from under the feet of these sectarian parties knowing perfectly well that none of them will ever attempt to change or cancel *Allah's* laws should they come to power. It has put the northern opposition in an awkward position, which borders on political ransom. The NIF regime seems to tell the Muslims in

opposition: “*Why are you fighting us when we have achieved what you could not in forty years?*” The positive aspect of this development is that the regime permanently and irreversibly has eschewed the usual Arab pretensions and ambiguity that Sudan is both an Arab and African country, which in practice really meant nothing.

Thirdly, the NIF regime, by a series of punitive measures against dissent and opposition, has managed to monopolise all sectors of the national economy pushing out of business and the market the traditional social base of the Umma Party and the Democratic Unionist Party, the main opposition forces in the north. It has steadily eroded the social base of the Umma Party in western and central Sudan by re-organising the Arab peoples in Dar Fur and Kordofan along an ancient Arab political and administrative hierarchy. The tribal chiefs are now known as ‘*Amirs*’ and ‘*sultans*’ instead of ‘*sheikhs*’ and ‘*omdas*’. The national currency has been changed from the pound to ‘*Dinar*’ in accordance with the Arab and Islamic orientation of the regime.

Fourthly, the NIF regime has adopted a political survival strategy by fomenting conflict and instability in the neighbouring countries. It actively supports Islamic and dissident groups fighting the governments in the neighbouring countries of Eritrea, Ethiopia, Egypt and Uganda. The regime supports Islamic political movements in Kenya and Somalia. It supports the Hutu rebels and the *interahamwe* against the RPF government in Rwanda and who are based in DR Congo. The NIF regime has thrown its political and military weight behind Laurent Kabila in a conflict that shattered the alliance in the Great Lakes Region that brought about the demise of Mobutu Sese Seko in 1997.

The objective of this strategy is first and foremost to destabilise, and then, where possible, assist in the overthrowing of the regimes in order to pave the way for the take over of the state by the Islamic groups in these countries. This expansionist and political survival strategy, mediated by the export of a brand of Islamic fundamentalism utilises subtle means including terrorism, drug trafficking and corruption, and aims to create a halo of satellite regimes around Khartoum as the centre of fresh Arab conquest and colonisation of Africa. This strategy is borne out in a statement by the NIF regime’s chief ideologue and architect of Islamic revivalism, Dr. Hassan Abdalla el Turabi, who, as recently as February 1999, was quoted in the media as saying, “*We want to Islamise America and Arabise Africa*”. These twin objectives can only be realised in modern times, as in the ancient, by means of conquest notwithstanding the fact that the international settings have changed.

The continuation, therefore, of the NIF at the helm of power in Khartoum is most likely to escalate the war in the south, east and west of the Sudan. Should it succeed in defeating the SPLM/A and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA)³, and break the resistance of the Africans in the Sudan, and then it can easily transform the Sudan into a springboard for the NIF’s subterfuge in the countries of the Horn of Africa, the Great Lakes Region and possibly Southern Africa. The tactics of their war reveal a remarkable resemblance to those of the seventh century. These include *inter alia*, *scorched earth policy* and ‘*ethnic cleansing*’ against the African people, in the South, Dar Fur, Kordofan, Blue Nile and Red Sea Hills. The war, now characterised by pillage, plunder, enslavement of the conquered of the African peoples⁴ or their conversion to Islam, is reminiscent of the seventh century Arab wars of conquest in

North Africa and other parts of the world.

The NIF regime has now started to export Sudanese petroleum. This will put at its disposal huge economic and financial resources it can utilise for vigorously prosecuting the war and fomenting conflicts and wars in the neighbouring countries. Because this regime fronts for the Arab cause in the Sudan, the various Arab dominated political blocks in the Sudan, irrespective of their ideological hues, were able to mobilise (on the basis of solidarity and right to support fellow Arab) and garner political, economic and military support from other Arab countries⁵. Sudan accordingly is setting itself up as a front of a fresh wave of Arab conquest and Arabisation of black Africa. In this respect, the present wars in different parts of the Sudan can be characterised as aspects of a wider Afro-Arab conflict.

This explains why the conflict in the Sudan receives wide and close hearings in the Arab forums. The situation in the Sudan and the progress of the war is regularly put on the political agenda of the Arab League. This is at a time when it has never been raised in or placed on the agenda of the Organisation for African Unity (OAU). The Arabs led by Egypt have tenaciously resisted the inclusion of the conflict in the various OAU summits and ministerial meetings on account of it being an "internal matter".

Many Arab leaders and political thinkers in the Sudan and other parts of the Arab world have the propensity to invoke the past glory of the Arab nation, partly as a means of escaping from their harsh realities of defeat by the West following the collapse of the Ottoman empire at the beginning of this century, and the West's subsequent predominance in the political, economic and technological spheres, which led to their colonisation⁶.

The Arabs have an overt political agenda for the destruction of the Jewish State of Israel, whose establishment in the middle of the Arab world they blame on the Christian West. *Hamas, Hizbu Allah* and other radical Islamic and Arab groups that sprouted onto the political scene in the Middle East in the late seventies and eighties were a reflection of the Arab desire to regain their glory and dignity. This made the shift towards winning over to the Arab side of black Africa, whether by force or otherwise, a significant factor in Arab foreign policy, especially after the October 1973 round of fighting between the Arabs and Israel, as a result of which the Arabs unleashed their oil 'weapon' on the world.

The Arabs look down with contempt on the African people in general as an inferior race, deserving nothing more than enslavement⁷. Thus, even being a Muslim is not a sufficient criterion to save an African from this scorn and contempt. The war between the African peoples of Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa and the Arabs in western Sudan serves to prove this point⁸. This falsity is exacerbated by the conviction among many Arab thinkers and writers that the Africans don't have a culture of their own. Accordingly, a cultural vacuum exists in Africa following de-colonisation, which must be filled with Islamic and Arab culture. The refusal on the part of the Arabs to recognise the rights of the Africans to self-determination, a denial, which actually fuels the Sudan conflict, underpins this falsehood.

II. This Paper – a Theoretical and Empirical Definition of the Problem

This paper is a modest attempt to link the current conflict and war in the Sudan to the ancient Afro-Arab conflict which began twelve centuries ago, and which culminated in the conquest, occupation, Islamisation and Arabisation of North Africa. Its objective, therefore, is to illustrate how the Arab

political, cultural, religious, economic and military *'threat'* to black Africa in the next millennium is more real than imagined. It suggests there is an Arab design to defeat Africa by religious and economic means, and to occupy and transform it into a military machine in support of the Islamic confrontation with the Christian West and the Jewish State of Israel.

The material for this paper is made up of empirical data drawn from the Sudan and the countries immediately bordering the Sudan. In defining the problem, we make the following assumptions and considerations: -

- Islam's doctrine and theology, like other heavenly faiths, is that some of its tenets cannot be liberally debated nor their validity debated scientifically, even by Muslim scholars without running the risk of being accused of apostasy⁹. Its difficulties and, therefore, conflict with other cultural realms arise from its nature and the fundamental contentious assumption that it is humanity's ultimate destiny. Its proselytisation methodology, which sanctions violence and war to achieve its objective(s), makes constructive dialogue with Islam in order to achieve *détente* and peaceful coexistence or cohabitation almost impossible¹⁰. The Muslims have a propensity to use violence to frustrate any meaningful dialogue, which they perceive would not be in their favour.
- At various stages, Islam has, wherever it set foot, served as a vehicle for the propagation of Arab language, culture and influence, except for the brief period when the Turks (nineteen - twentieth century) took over as the dominant political and military power in the Middle East and North Africa. The resurgence of Arab nationalism following the defeat and collapse of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War was hooked to Islamic revivalism and reformation, which became the ideological battle cry for Arab independence and solidarity.
- The Arabs, stirred by their profound belief and conviction of belonging to an elite nation, superior to all others, and a people destined by divine provision to conquer the world, propel themselves into war believing they are fulfilling a religious duty and executing the will of *Allah*. In the same vein, the Arabs inflamed by the desire to regain their ancient glory, can easily ignite in Africa a big religious and racial conflagration, in the hope that the victories out of such an adventure can remove the stigma of their repeated humiliations at the hands of the Europeans and the Jews.
- The Christian West at present is more concerned with, and protects its economic interests and markets found in the Middle East and the Arab world. It is, therefore, not likely to perceive these contradictions in terms of Christianity versus Islam. Hence, it will not be drawn into a religious war of resistance to Arab expansion in Africa. The plight of the Lebanese Maronite Christians in the rise of Islamic revivalist movements in the Middle East in the late seventies and eighties is a case in point, especially when it occurred in the wake of the Islamic revivalist movement that culminated in the Iranian revolution in 1979 and the destruction of the Lebanese state. The Copts in Egypt have resigned themselves to a destiny of *dhimmitude*¹¹ (protected persons) in their country of birth.
- The current conflict and border war between the erstwhile allies, the Eritrean and Ethiopian regimes, against the NIF regime has complicated the situation in the region of the Horn, giving the NIF more

leverage. The mutual weakening of the Eritrean and Ethiopian people as a result of this war gives the Arabs advantage in their centuries old ambitions to Islamise and Arabise Ethiopia and Eritrea. The hands of the NIF regime in this conflict, and its escalation, are obvious. First because Eritrea initially severed diplomatic relations with the regime and not only that, but the Eritrean Authorities preceded to hand over the Sudan Embassy in Asmara to the National Democratic Alliance. The NIF regime's relations with Ethiopia soured in June 1995 following the assassination attempt on the life of the Egyptian President Mubarak. The Sudan government was implicated in this terrorist action, and it was put under UN Security Council sanctions.

- Classical Islam divides the world into '*dar el Islam*' and '*dar el harb*' inhabited by the Muslims and non-Muslims respectively. These two are in constant conflict until Islam triumphs over the non-believers. In such a situation Islam can only compromise when it is in a weak position: politically, economically and militarily. Propelled by this ideology, the Arabs don't respect any agreement they make with people considered as inferior. For instance, the present war in the Sudan has its roots in Nimeri's abrogation of the Addis Ababa Agreement reached in 1972 with the South Sudan Liberation Movement, which ended the seventeen years war. The ethnic conflict in Dar Fur, which the NIF regime prefers to call '*armed robbery*', is a full-blown war between the Arabs and the African peoples of Fur, Zaghawa, Masalit and others. This is occasioned by the Arab's hegemony, both politically and economically, with serious ramifications in Chad and the Central African Republic.
- Still on the Arabs not respecting

agreements, they also don't accept or recognise the existence of ethnic and religious minorities in their midst, especially if they are weak and dependent on the Arab state. This, of course, springs from the logic that in an Arab/Islamic state, a non-Muslim is not a citizen. This underpins the destruction of the Lebanese State under the pressure of the Islamic fundamentalist groups.

- The various northern political parties, including the NIF, reject the inalienable right of the people of South Sudan, the Nuba Mountains and Southern Blue Nile to self-determination. Although the parties to the NDA endorsed the provision for self-determination in the Asmara Declaration 1995, all of them made independent and separate submissions against the exercise of the right of self-determination¹². In fact, they equate self-determination with secession, and in the words of Mohammed Osman el Mirghani, the DUP leader and Chairman of the NDA, it is only a mechanism for stopping the war.
- The Sudanese conflict predates its independence in 1956; nevertheless, it has never been put on the political agenda of either the Organisation for African Unity or the United Nations. It has always remained at the level of humanitarian intervention. This has been because of the strong Arab lobby in both organisations headed by Egypt, which still harbours colonial ambitions over the Sudan and Africa as a whole. It can go to war on the side of the Arab government in Khartoum should it perceive that its interests are being jeopardised. Although Egypt projects the question of the Nile waters as its main reason for Sudan's territorial unity and integrity, which disposes it against the rights of the African people in the Sudan, it

is dominance of the Arabs that it intends to protect in the Sudan.

- The recent Libyan-Egyptian peace initiative¹³ – deliberately engineered to water down the Inter-Governmental Authority on Draught and Development (IGADD) Peace process – is a manifestation of the Arab attitude towards the African people. IGADD sub committee on the Sudanese conflict does not have a single Arab country. This has made the Egyptians and the northern political parties uncomfortable with IGADD and its Declaration of Principles (DoP) 1994. The Egyptians and the Libyans reject out of hand the rights of the people of South Sudan and other marginalised areas to self-determination. It therefore becomes even more impossible to merge the two initiatives, as has been suggested recently.
- The SPLM/A, the only credible political-military force in the Sudan opposed to the NIF regime and its political-ideological orientation, suffers from serious organisational and structural malaise manifested in schisms, in fighting and desertions within its rank and file, sometimes paralysing its military operations. These internal developments make the SPLA vulnerable, which could eventually lead to it being defeated by the NIF regime and its militia (some of whom were former SPLA soldiers), unless the situation is remedied.

This scenario conjures up prospects for increased military pressure on the governments in the Horn and the Great Lakes Region. A number of critical observations have been noted: -

In Uganda

Nearly all the Ugandan dissident groups, until

1997, had bases and operated from the Sudan. They are part of the NIF regime's strategy of destabilising its neighbours. A defeat of the SPLA will witness the strengthening of the NIF regime's support for e.g. the Lord Resistance Army (LRA), the Allied Democratic Front (ADF), the West Nile Bank Front (WBNF), the Royalists and federalists opposed to the National Resistance Movement government.

- In 1994, when the SPLA was with its back to the wall in Nimuli, President Omer el Beshir declared he was going to say his evening prayers in a Kampala Mosque twenty four hours after his troops captured Nimuli from the SPLA. This is a revealing comment, suggesting that the Sudanese army would not stop at the Sudan-Uganda border, but would proceed to overthrow the NRM government and replace it with a puppet regime made up of the various rebel groups fighting the NRM government.
- The picture becomes clearer when viewed against the recent declarations made by Hassan el Turabi that "*We want to Islamise America and Arabise Africa*". This underpins the NIF regime's hope to defeat the SPLM/A and hence the Arab intransigence and refusal to recognise the right of the people of South Sudan to self-determination is shown.

In Kenya

- The Republic of Kenya, apart from the disturbances in the North Eastern Province inhabited by the Somali, has been relatively stable. However, in the context of the struggle for political pluralism, the Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK), a radical Islamic group professing fundamentalist tendencies, sprouted onto the political stage.
- The political programme of the IPK, apart

from propagating Islamic religion, entails increased and effective participation of the Muslims in the running of the state. The IPK is working hard for the introduction of the Islamic Sharia Laws and at the same time to minimize the influence of the Church and the West in Kenya.

- Although, the NIF regime has not committed itself as in Uganda, it is an open secret that the regime has had contacts with, and supports, the IPK. It offers material and moral support to the Islamic groups. This includes training of IPK operatives and activists in the Sudan.
- In Kenya, the NIF operates through such open channels as the Islamic Relief and Humanitarian Agencies (IARA), which run humanitarian assistance programmes (food and medical) for the poor in the slums of the major cities and rural areas like the Turkana District, Eastern, North-Eastern and Western provinces. It also undertakes clandestine activities through the IPK and some Sudanese commercial businesses in Nairobi, belonging to the NIF.
- The spread of Islam, as a religious faith, is on the increase in Kenya. This is assisted by the dire economic crisis that has pushed the vast majority of the people into a cycle of poverty in which salvation seems to lie in religious revivalism. The Muslim organisations have been using food and other economic assistance as a weapon in their proselytisation programme.

The DR Congo

- The formation of the Democratic Republic of Congo came against a backdrop of regional political engineering, that brought about the demise of Mobutu Sese Seko through an alliance of the Congolese rebels under Kabila, the RPF in Rwanda and the

NRM government in Uganda. This alliance, however, ran into internal disputes, which witnessed a shift in the alignment of forces. The NIF regime took the side of Kabila in his conflict with his former allies, which went far beyond the economic and diplomatic considerations between neighbouring states. In fact the NIF regime amassed troops in northern Congo with the intention of attacking the SPLA from its rear in western Equatoria.

- The regime supports a small group of Congolese Islamic groups, most of whom were former refugees and rebel groups that have been living as refugees in the Sudan since the sixties. Many of them have now converted to Islam and have been transported back to the Congo to form an advance team.
- The Kabila regime is now allied to the enemies of his former allies in Rwanda and Uganda. The Kinshasa regime continued to give sanctuary to the *interahamwe* and the Hutu rebels against the Rwandan government. Through Kabila, the NIF regime continued to supply military logistics to the Allied Democratic Front (ADF) and the West Nile Bank Front (WNBF) both based in DR Congo after being routed out of South Sudan by the SPLA in 1997. While the immediate objective of this co-operation is to get a bridgehead for action against the SPLA, the NIF intends to make political and ideological inroads into Central and Southern Africa¹⁴

In Ethiopia

- Ethiopia has the longest common borders with the Sudan. Historically all the regimes that came and went in the Sudan supported the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) on account of its being a pro-Arab movement.

But the hidden agenda of the Arabs regarding Ethiopia was the desire to break the resistance of Ethiopia to Islamisation and Arabisation.

- Its dismemberment, through internal contradictions therefore, became their goal. The Sudan government supported the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF – *shaabia*), the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and other groups that fought Emperor Haile Sellassie, the regime of Mengistu and the present EPRDF regime in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia led by the TPLF.
- The NIF regime continues to support the Oromo Liberation Front, the *Gamia el islamiya* and others fighting the government of Meles Zenawi. This resulted in the cooling of relations between the two countries, especially in the wake of a terrorist attempt on the life of the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa in June 1995. But now, because of the conflict with Eritrea, the relation between Addis Ababa and Khartoum has tremendously warmed to the chagrin of the Eritreans and the Sudanese opposition. The NIF is exploiting these contradictions for its political survival.

In Eritrea

- In spite of its massive support for the people of Eritrea in their bid for independence from Ethiopia, the NIF continued to undermine the independence of the state of Eritrea by encouraging cross border raids by the Islamic groups opposed to the regime in Asmara and based in the Sudan. The Sudan government has not hidden its support for

the Arab-led Eritrean Liberation Front, that was routed out of power in the struggle for independence by EPLF (*Shaabia*).

- In 1995, the government of Eritrea, wary of these provocations, severed diplomatic relations with Khartoum, closed the embassy and took a rare and courageous step of handing over the embassy to the Sudanese opposition of the National Democratic Alliance. Since then the two countries have been in a state of undeclared war. The NDA forces operate from their H/Qs in Asmara and from the former Sudanese Embassy.
- The Eritrean action befits a rogue regime that does not respect international protocols that guide relations between states. This is because the NIF regime justifies its actions in the neighbouring countries of Eritrea, Ethiopia and Uganda on account of the conflict between *dar el Islam* and *dar el harb*, sanctioned by divine will.

In Somalia

- Although Somalia falls outside the scenario described above, it is an excellent example of chaos and anarchy, which presents opportunities for Islamic fundamentalist to exploit. The collapse of the Somali state could be a precursor to some of the scenarios in the Horn of Africa.
- The NIF regime in Khartoum has been entangled in some of the warlords' rivalry. In addition, but it has found the situation in Somalia quite opportune to train Islamist cadres from the countries neighbouring Somalia, e.g. Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and to infiltrate them back into these countries.

III. The Basis of the War and Conflict in the Sudan

Sudan is a multiplicity of ethnicities, religions,

cultures and languages. The carving out of the Sudan by the Anglo-Egyptian condominium into what it is today was completed only in 1920.¹⁵ Despite this fact, and since its independence from the Anglo-Egyptian condominium in 1956, the Arab ruling political and military elite, who inherited the colonial state, defined Sudan in terms of only two parameters: Arabism and Islam. This definition excludes a great majority of its citizens, who don't subscribe to the two parameters.

The ethnic and religious multiplicities of the Sudan run approximately along the north-south divide. Mainly Arabs and those, who claim Arab ancestry and identify with an Arab Muslim culture, inhabit the north. In fact north Sudanese consider themselves part and parcel of the Arab nation¹⁶. They aspire to develop culturally, spiritually and socio-economically along a political path that will eventually integrate them with the rest of the Arab world. They uphold that ideally their way and conduct of life should be organised in accordance with the *Qu'ran* and the *Sharia* (Islamic legal code). North Sudan looks further north to Egypt and eastwards across the Red Sea to the Arab world for inspiration, identity and development¹⁷.

In contrast the Africans, who inhabit south and central Sudan, aspire to develop culturally, spiritually and economically along a political path that will perpetuate and enrich their authentic African identity and heritage and enable them have harmonious social intercourse with their kith and kin in Africa. South Sudanese and other African groups in the north look to their African neighbours for identity, solidarity, culture, and socio-economic development.

The conflict in the Sudan, therefore, arises on the basis of the Arab north's claim that the

Sudanese nationality is a transition to full integration to Arab nationality for those who are not of the Arab stock. The different regimes in Khartoum, therefore, prosecuted the war in the South, Western and Central Sudan on the basis of transforming the Sudan into a fully-fledged Arab nation. Furthermore, the rulers in Khartoum consider South Sudan a frontier for Arab and Islamic expansion into East, Central and Southern Africa. This has been repeatedly and publicly stated by various North Sudanese leaders and their "*warrior priests*" as a means for soliciting economic and financial resources in the Arab capital cities.

The resolution of this conflict lies not in the territorial unity of the Sudan, but rather in its dismemberment as a rational means of stopping the war and containing Arab hegemony. The people of South Sudan, the Nuba Mountains and Southern Blue Nile have resolved for the establishment of the New Sudan¹⁸, which can only enter into a confederal arrangement with the North during the interim period leading to an internationally supervised referendum to exercise the right of self-determination.

The African people in Western Sudan (the different Fur peoples) and Eastern Sudan (the Beja) have taken up arms to defend their rights to national existence. In fact Dar Fur was the last province to be annexed to the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. It is highly possible that, in view of the current situation, the Fur peoples could opt for separate and independent existence, or join up with their compatriots in the New Sudan.

The break up of the Sudan will leave the Arabs with a small riverian territory. It will be a weak state, which may definitely unite with Egypt for its survival on the basis of Islam and Arabism. This will minimise the threat of

Arab expansion into Africa through the Sudan.

IV. The Arab Conquest of North Africa and the Sudan - Some Historical Dimensions of an On-Going Process

The rise of Islam in the early part of the seventh century united the Arab peoples in *Hijaz*, Yemen and the adjoining territories into a powerful military machine that conquered and destroyed civilisations, enslaved their peoples, plundered and pillaged their wealth and erased their cultures and languages etc., in what apparently was an Arab attempt to conquer and dominate the whole world.

A lot has been written about the Arab-Islamic conquests. Although much has been attributed to the nature of Islam and what it promises its converts, and those who rise to leadership positions within its ranks, the fact is that these conquests could not have been without a strategic impulse. Sir Thomas Arnold attributed the Arab expansion not to religious zeal but to the "*migration of a people driven by hunger and want to overrun the richer lands of their neighbours*"¹⁹. As nomads living under desolate desert conditions, this assessment is credible. This explains the devastation, the pillage, enslavement suffered by the conquered nations and the tendency after war to bring back the booty to *Hijaz*. The acquisition of wealth was the motivating factor in these wars of conquest.

It was through these wars that the Arabs arrived in North Africa. And already by 640 AD, Egypt had been conquered. In 643 the Arab armies ransacked Tripoli (present day Libya), Carthage was also razed to the ground, and the whole of what is now Maghreb was put to fire and sword breaking the resistance of the Berbers²⁰.

The Arab conquest of North Africa, like most

of the other territories in Western, Southern and Eastern Europe and Asia, was characterised by excessive brutality, pillage, plunder, destruction and desecration of churches, temples, places of worship and other sacred places, erosion of cultures and languages, and either wanton massacres, enslavement, especially women and children, or their conversion of the inhabitants to Islam.

The countries of North Africa: Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania, claim Arab nationhood today, including its leadership (Nasir's Egypt championed and led the Arab nationalism), as a result of these conquests and the twin processes of Islamisation and Arabisation. The original peoples, their languages (except for the Berbers), religions and cultures have been completely and irreversibly erased from the face of the earth. Only the Copts were able to retain their religion.

The rest of black Africa was perhaps saved the scorch of Arab savagery by two factors: The Sahara desert, that was a physical barrier, which could not be traversed easily by foot soldiers and the *suddud* marshes and the thick tropical forests that hindered the Arab penetration.

But, perhaps, the most important factor had more to do with Europe and Asia. Since Arab conquest was driven by religious zeal – Islam, and territorial aggrandisement for acquisition of wealth, their main target was Christianity and Judaism. Therefore, Europe and the outlying areas drew the attention of the Arab and Muslim commanders. The detour into North Africa by the Arab-Islamic armies was perhaps to outflank Europe. Had they conquered Europe completely, perhaps the Arabs would have returned to Africa in time to complete their conquest. Islam and Arab influence in West Africa and parts of the

Sahel region in the latter years was more by peaceful means than wars through the missionary works of the Arab traders – priests. The Arab conquest of the Sudan, however, came overland from Egypt. It was more in search of treasures: slaves, gold, ivory, ebony, ostrich feathers and conquest of land that attracted the Arabs rulers of Egypt to the Sudan, as can be illustrated by these words.

*"...[you] are aware that the end of all our efforts and this expense is to procure Negroes. Please show zeal in carrying out our wishes in this capital matter..."*²¹

By the end of the fourteenth century the Arabs had completed their penetration into the Nubia, with the defeat and consequent Islamisation of the Christian Kingdoms of Mukkura with its capital in Dongola and Alwa whose capital was in Soba. Dongola finally fell to the invading Arab forces in 1275-76.

Ibn Khaldun describes the Arab conquest of the Sudan as follows:

*"... In Upper Egypt from Aswan to beyond its as far as the land of the Nuba and that of Abyssinia are numerous peoples (Arabs) and scattered sections, all of them belonging to the Guhayna, one of the branches of Kuda'a. They filled those parts and conquered the land of the Nuba and swarmed over those of Abyssinia and shared their countries with them..."*²²

This conquest did not follow the pattern set by the Arabs in North Africa, but occurred in bounds, depending on the resistance of the local people. For instance in 651-2, Abdullahi Ibn Sa'd Ibn Abi Shah led a Muslim army and besieged Dongola. However, he failed to conquer it, but withdrew after concluding a treaty, which established for 600 years trading relations and *modus vivendi* between Muslim

Egypt and the Christian Nubia²³. This rather long truce continued intact during the Mamluks rule of Egypt (1382 – 1517).

In 1517, however, Selim I, Sultan of Turkey, defeated the Mamluks and made Egypt a province of the Ottoman Empire. It is worth mentioning that the demographic composition of Nubia changed in favour of the Arabs, even before its final conquest.

*"A strong infiltration of the Egyptians and later Egyptian and the Arab type was steadily and almost uninterruptedly proceeding in northern Sudan and the Negroes elements was correspondingly decreasing in that region".*²⁴

It was initially through peaceful cohabitation and Islamic missionary work that power and authority passed into the hands of the Muslims, that eventually led to their overthrow of the Christian Kingdoms. Nubia consequently transformed from *dar el harb* to *dar el Islam*.

*"Once the Arabs had overthrown the Christian Kingdoms of Dongola and established themselves, they rapidly amalgamated themselves with the local Nubians and began to send colonisers further afield"*²⁵.

In this way the Arabs contributed to the destruction of the Christian kingdom of Alwa and the fall of Soba, and in this manner the Arabs managed to complete their occupation of the north Sudan.

The Funj, an African people, emerged as a power in Central Sudan in the early 16th Century. They countered the Arab penetration further to the South. However, the Funj Kingdom became an Islamic Sultanate as a result of the conversion of its rulers, with the Funj King claiming Arab ancestry. This was

due more to Arab missionary work than war and conquest. The claim to Arab origin and the adoption of Arabic names was to ease trade with Cairo more than anything else. The Fur Sultanate in Dar Fur paralleled the rise of the Funj Kingdom in Sennar east of the Nile. Although these states were Islamic, they remained independent, resisting further Arab incursions.

It is believed that the Shilluks founded the Funj Kingdom. This is because until 1841, at the height of the Turco-Egyptian occupation of North Sudan, the Shilluks were in full control of the Nile valley up to Buga (Omdurman) and the Arabs depended on the Shilluks inhabitants for crossing the Nile. The introduction of firearms changed the balance of forces in favour of the Arabs.

The defeat of the Mamluks and the fall of Egypt to Turkish rule gave another dimension to the Arab conquest of the Sudan. By 1841, the whole of North Sudan had come under the Turco-Egyptian occupation as reflected in this report:

*" ... I have granted you the government of the provinces of Nubia, Dar Fur, Kordofan and Sennar with all their dependencies – that is to say, with all their adjoining regions outside the limits of Egypt. Guided by the experience and the wisdom that distinguish you, you will apply yourself to administer and organise these provinces according to my equitable views and to provide for the welfare of the inhabitants..."*²⁶

The Turco-Egyptian rule of Northern Sudan was ruthless, inefficient, corrupt and oppressive, which was built on the practice and trafficking of slavery. No wonder that Mohammed Ahmed Abdullah (Mahdi), with support of the African peoples in Western and Eastern Sudan, led an Islamic revolt against

this regime in 1881. The Mahdi's mission was driven by Islamic zeal. Once the Turco-Egyptian regime had been defeated and routed, the Mahdist's state embarked on raising a huge slave army for the conquest of the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia, and the adjoining areas. This was along the lines, mentioned earlier, which the Arabs used in their conquest of North Africa, and of the Nubia. The Mahdist's state was conquered by a joint Anglo-Egyptian expedition in 1898 with the establishment of the Anglo-Egyptian condominium, which lasted until 1956.

V. The Afro-Arab Conflict in the 21st Century: Between Reality and Fiction

This sub title is neither a reflection of a racist tendency on my part, nor is its intention to generate unnecessary alarm. Nor is it also not an academic fantasy. It is a serious matter that requires responsible and considered handling. This is because, whether we like it or not, the Afro-Arab conflict in the Sudan is real. It has been going on, albeit silently, since the Arab conquest of the Christian kingdom of Nubia in the twelfth century. The world watched the people of South Sudan bleed about one and half million people to death in the seventeen years' war²⁷ between the North and the South. That war, like the present one, which started in 1983, is just a symptom of the same conflict.

Whether or not this war will extend to the Great Lakes Region, the Horn of Africa and to Southern Africa is what this paper is all about. My contention is that, given the present alignment of forces, and the Arab ambitions in Africa, the conflict is likely to extend to the rest of black Africa. Many leaders in black Africa today, out of liberalism, or lack of direct experience with the Arabs, or sheer ignorance, may elect to disregard this threat and look at the relations between the Arabs and Africans in purely economic terms. This

is positively dangerous, because by the time they realise the danger, they will not have prepared their people psychologically and politically for its consequences.

The present international political environment is such that an overt Arab aggression against the countries in the region may not be possible²⁸. Rather, a more subtle process is at hand. In this the internal social, political and economic difficulties in black African countries are contradictions that are exploited. We have evidence that an Arab country like the Sudan has instigated internal conflicts inside its neighbouring countries like Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda.

I ground my thesis of an Arab 'threat' to African countries during this century in past and present relations between Arabs and Africans. This relation has not been friendly or cordial to say the least ever since Arabs set foot in Africa.

Historically, the Arabs participated in the enslavement of Africans. Large numbers of African slaves were exported to the Arab world across the Red Sea from Abyssinia, Sudan, the Central African Republic and Chad, and from East Africa through the Indian Ocean into the Gulf area. But today, it is very rare to find descendents of these slaves in the Arab countries in the way they are found in the Americas and West Indies.

The reason for this anomaly lies in the Arab's non-recognition of black people as human beings. The men were castrated and the women were turned into sex machines. As a result of their involvement in the traffic of human beings, their relations with Africans smacks of an Arab sense of superiority and illustrates their contempt for black people in the Sudan. Even today, the slave legacy still persists and the Arabs pride themselves in

calling their black compatriots 'abeed' or slaves. Slavery exists today in Sudan as it exists in Mauritania, where it is official policy. The objects of this inhumanity are the black people.

On their side, the Africans have always supported the Arabs and their cause. On the political and diplomatic fronts, the African states *en masse* severed diplomatic and other relations with the Jewish State of Israel. This was done partly in solidarity with the Arab cause, and partly on the promise of 'petrodollar' economic assistance to the African countries. However, when the Arabs unleashed their 'oil weapon', the African countries were never spared the pangs of this economic war. In fact the economies of many African countries have not recovered to date as a result of the 1973 hike in the oil prices. Further, no African country can boast of having received meaningful Arab assistance without religious strings attached²⁹. The establishment of the African Development Bank (ADB) did little to compensate for what these African states received from their relation with the Jewish State.

It is true that the Arabs supported African Liberation Movements in the sixties and seventies. Progressive Arab countries like Egypt and Algeria were in the forefront of African de-colonisation, within the context of the Organisation for African Unity. And the conservative Arab countries like Morocco and Tunisia supported reactionary forces in those African countries fighting for liberation. Libya later joined in this support for African liberation after the revolution September 1st 1969, which brought Col. Gadhafi to power. But all these were in the context of the ideological struggle against imperialism.

Libyan support for African liberation came against a backdrop of its designs, which

locked it up in a bitter border war with Chad. It needed a military defeat at the hands of the Chadians for Libya to drop its claims over the Ouzo strip. In 1979, on the pretext of support for the dictator Amin, Moamer Gadhafi dispatched 3,000 troops who were later taken prisoners of war by the Tanzanian army. Libya today continues to support Arab peoples in Western Sudan against their African neighbours and compatriots.

A bottled up frustration with the West, notably USA and Britain, over their support for the state of Israel, could potentially precipitate a terrorist venture on the African continent. The bombing in 1998 of the American Embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, and the aborted one in Kampala, killed fifty times more innocent Africans than Americans. The targeting of American interests in an African country is an important pointer to the manner the Arabs regards African countries.

These facts may perhaps not be sufficient grounds for the thesis I have postulated. In the absence of tangible and objectively verifiable evidence, it may be possible to dismiss this Arab 'threat' as a political hoax. But as I said above, the Arab 'threat' in East, Central and Southern Africa may not be frontal like, for instance, direct Arab aggression against a particular African country, except in the Sudan itself³⁰. No, but the threat can come as a result of the exploitation of the internal situation in a particular country. Given the social, political and economic situation of the countries of East, Central and Southern Africa the 21st century is likely to witness ethnic, religious and civil strife in these regions. These will be triggered and fuelled by the following: -

1. The Economic Crisis and Growing Poverty in the Region

The economies of these African countries are

in shambles. Economic growth is in decline in many of these countries. The state capacity to exploit the natural resource potential is minimised as a result of widespread corruption in government institutions. There is a progressive pauperisation of the rural as well as the urban population, provoking a rural to urban migration, swelling the numbers of slums and slum dwellers in the cities. This negatively affects the quality of social services these cities are able to offer. The livelihood of the people in these cities is becoming less secure, as more and more people are pushed into the periphery – into the conflict situation.

This is the result of a combination of several factors, including what Jean-François Bayart *et al* call a process of criminalisation:

"imploded under combined effects of economic crisis, [...] structural adjustment programmes and loss of political legitimacy of political institutions [...] and the political life consisting first and foremost of management of factional intrigues for personal interests..."³¹.

This has triggered off bitter and lethal social and ethnic rivalries over the diminishing natural resource base as well as state power itself. The genocide in Rwanda (1994), the on-going war between the Tutsi dominated army and the Hutu rebels in Burundi, and the land/ethnic clashes in Kenya from 1992 to date, and cattle rustling as a means of asset transfer among the pastoral communities are but a few examples of this poverty crisis.

Population explosion is another dimension to this poverty crisis, which is very visible in all these countries. Population increase has stretched beyond effectiveness the already diminishing resources and services these states can provide their citizens. Crimes, diseases, especially the sexually transmitted

diseases and HIV/AIDS take their toll on the poor section of the population.

The factor of poverty crisis works itself into a process that generates internal conflicts with the subsequent weakening of the state. Thus the NGOs and relief agencies take the centre stage in the lives of the rural and urban poor, which have been left to fend for themselves. The state agencies sometimes pay little attention to the activities of these NGOs as long as they are not of immediate threat to the security of the state. For instance, relief food, economic and financial resources have become tools for Islamic proselytisation in the rural areas and poor suburbs in the major cities. This is reflected in the increased numbers of veiled women, indicative of the efficacy of the strategy, although in essence, this does not contribute in a meaningful way to poverty alleviation and eradication. What it does is that the people are energised to question the state and its religious institutions, which are not Islamic³².

2. *Crisis of Democratic Participation in the State*

Most the conflicts in Africa today can be attributed to the failure of the postcolonial state to meet the aspirations of the people. In most of the cases, the state is monopolised by a minority on the basis of ethnicity, religion, education and economic dominance to the complete exclusion of the vast majority of the citizens. In most cases, the state has become oppressive, using brute force to quell dissidence.

The wind of change towards multiparty dispensation that swept across Africa in the early nineties has failed to sprout genuine democratic changes, which were the main expectations of the people. The frustration and anger generated by the adamancy of the ruling elite to stick to power is likely to fuel the

internal factional splits and conflicts in many of these countries along ethnic or religious lines.

- In Kenya, for instance, the ruling elite, afraid of the repercussions for the crimes they have perpetrated, prefer to run down the country politically and economically rather than share power with the other factions that broke away from it in the early nineties. What is happening in Kenya today could be likened to what somebody described as a 'short cut' to decay being undertaken by the ruling political elite. The road to a constitutional reform process has been riddled with obstacles where political violence may be the way out. The conditions for civil breakdown are being created by the irresponsible greed for power and the ruling faction of this political elite is working itself into an explosive situation, feeding on ethnic rivalry and animosities, which can easily elicit external intervention.
- The National Resistance Movement (NRM), which has controlled the state in Uganda since 1986, is increasingly coming under pressure from various quarters to allow power sharing and political pluralism. Uganda went through multi-party political dispensation in the sixties and seventies. The monopoly of power by the Northern political elite, both civilian and military, landed the country in an unfathomable nightmare. Perhaps here lies the source of Uganda's political and economic ills. But political exclusion at the present, even under the NRM model, is not a way out of the cumulative effects of misrule and dictatorship. The convening of a national constitution conference comprising all the political opinion in the country, may assist in building a national consensus around a political dispensation and perhaps map out an escape route from the wars and conflicts

that have drained the country's resources.

- The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), like the NRM in Uganda, treads on a tightrope. The Tutsi dominated and driven political process in Rwanda will not be sustainable in the long run. The future for Rwanda lies in peaceful cohabitation of the land by both ethnic groups. The process of national reconciliation will be cemented by genuine participation by all. This will deny the enemies of Rwanda the opportunity to exploit the internal conflicts. The same could equally be said of Burundi, where a large majority of the population has somehow been excluded from political participation.
- Similarly, Ethiopia is sitting on a time bomb occasioned by one ethnic group, the Tigray, dominating the political process to the chagrin of other nationalities significantly the Oromo and the Amhara. The federation and regionalisation of the administrative authority is potentially positive, but objectives are suspect, especially if those at the helm of power in the regions play the role of apprentices or the relation between Addis Ababa and the region remain a patron-client relationship. Ethiopia has to build genuine participatory democratic institutions if it is to deny the Arabs the opportunity to destroy its centuries old sovereignty and territorial integrity³³. In all these examples, we find that political conflicts run parallel to ethnic and religious differences.

Linked perhaps to the poverty crisis in the region and the crisis of democratic participation in the state, is the lagging social and national awareness of the people. Except in Tanzania, where a clear national consciousness has been inculcated into the mind and hearts of the people, ethnic

tendencies are still dominant in most other countries. In Kenya, the promising opportunity for political and democratic transformation in the early nineties has given way to ethnicity as the basis for political organisation and action. For instance, the National Development Party (NDP) draws most of its membership from the Luo Nyanza, while for Democratic Party of Kenya (DP) is wholly a Kikuyu political establishment. This mode of political action has determined the type of alliances even at the level of the parliament³⁴. The division within the opposition not only paralyses it and prevents it from putting the ruling party on its toes, but it disorients the struggle for reforms and constitutional development. This situation, if allowed to continue, can result in civil conflict or the intervention of the army in governance.

Equitable sharing of national material resources can only ensure internal political stability. This includes the state itself as a power resource. To exclude a section of the populace from effective participation in the running of the state can result in unwanted consequences. Thus the engineering for political and democratic transformation should not result in complete exclusion of the other factions. All forces struggling for change in Africa should emulate the experience of post apartheid South Africa.

3. Regional Competitions and Conflicts

The collapse of the Mobutu regime in former Zaire ushered in fresh conflicts in the Great Lakes Region driven by competition over its vast mineral resources. The conflict in the Democratic Republic Congo between Rwanda and Uganda on the one hand and Kabila, Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia on the other hand; and the later fighting which erupted between the UPDF and RPF; the intervention of the NIF regime on behalf of Kabila, exposed a salient fact that the alliances in the

region were unprincipled and opportunistic.

The conflict in DR Congo has divided the African front that was forged against the white supremacist regime in South Africa. Zimbabwe had strong support for the SPLM/A in the eighties and early nineties. To see Zimbabwe as an inadvertent ally of the NIF regime in the Democratic Republic of Congo, simply over economic interests rather than ideological or political concerns, is a complete shift from the African liberation, which President Robert Mugabe earlier championed.

The border war between the erstwhile allies against the regime of Mengistu and their support for respective rival Warlords in Somalia has also exposed the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia as a form of competition over resources. In this case, it is Ethiopia's access to the sea that drives that conflict rather than the disagreement over a desert border area. Access to the seaport is important for the economy, but it really touches a sensitive national nerve in Ethiopia. However, it should only be negotiated diplomatically rather than by war.

The continuation of this conflict weakens the two countries. It deflects their mutual attention from, and makes them overlook the designs of the Arabs notably Sudan and Egypt. And in the political engineering that ensues the conflict has been exploited by the NIF to break itself out of regional isolation by acting as a broker between the two countries.

This conflict, although a contradiction between governments that were erstwhile politically very close like the conflict in the Great Lakes Region has serious regional repercussions. It constitutes an avenue for external intervention occasioned by the weakness of these states. An enemy who has

designs to conquer will wait for, and exploit, such weakness to its advantage. In this respect, it was imperative, in the first place, not to have allowed the political contradiction that engendered this war to develop into an open conflict. All diplomatic channels, including those under the auspices of the Organisation for African Unity, should have been utilised.

VI. What Possible African Responses to the Arab 'Threat'?

The subtitle is suggestive of an imminent 'Arab threat' to black Africa and I am convinced that it is real. The Arabs have attempted to conquer Africa in the past. The whole of North Africa boasts of Arab nationhood today simply because it was conquered. The local inhabitants and their languages have either been erased from the face of the earth or have been Arabised. The Copts and the Berbers, the Nubians (the Halfawiyeen, the Mahas and the Donagala) and others great African civilisations that existed in the region of North Africa and the Nile valley for nearly more than seven millennia, have been reduced to relics because of this abrasive Arab nationalism.

Given the nature of the conflicts in the region and the failure of the state therein to manage them, it is more likely that the next century will witness a renewed Afro-Arab conflict of a major dimension in the Horn of Africa, the Great Lakes Region and further in Southern Africa.

This is because the Arabs have not relinquished their ambitions for expansion into, and conquest of Africa, which they believe, was frozen by the intervention of imperialism. However, unlike the seventh century conquests of North Africa, the modern day Arab ambitions are likely to be expressed in economic, religious and cultural influences.

Sometimes, force and violence, as in the Sudan and East Africa exploiting the already deteriorating social, economic and political crisis in these countries will mediate these.

The scenario for this conflict takes the Sudan as the springboard occasioned by the growing political and military prowess of the NIF government. The current war, which started off initially as a contradiction between the ruling Arab circles in Khartoum and the people of South Sudan, but which has now engulfed all the African peoples in the West, Central, and Eastern Sudan, is a phase in this Afro-Arab conflict.

As long as Islamic religion and Arabic culture remain the dominant ideological perspective of the northern ruling circle and its political establishment, reinforced with reactionary pan-Arab nationalism, there is no way Sudan can continue to be united and peaceful. Force of arms through the oppression and enslavement of its indigenous African people maintained the territorial unity of the Sudan up to this moment in time. Even with that, the political elite failed to build a national consensus, which reflects the ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity of the Sudan. Thus, the conflict is likely to endure until the rights of the African people in the Sudan to self-determination and the establishment of the New Sudan as an independent and sovereign state are achieved.

The establishment of an independent, sovereign, democratic and secular New Sudan will constitute a strong guarantee for stability and peace in the region of the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region. This will break the link between the present NIF regime, or that of any future Arab-dominated government in Khartoum, that harbours Arab designs for the conquest of Africa, and the areas of conflicts in the region which it could

exploit for its own advantage.

However, the establishment will not be sufficient to deter any Arab aggression. It also demands adequate internal political and social stabilisation in the countries of the region. This will require the progressive political forces in Africa to coalesce and work together for the common good of the continent.

This includes the following political actions: -

1. Strengthening of the SPLM/A and the Other African Liberation Movements in the Sudan.

The SPLM/A has become a political and military power to reckon with at the regional level. It is part and parcel of the African liberation movement, which began with the struggle for de-colonisation. And incidentally it is an agent of de-colonisation and a weapon in the hands of the Africans in the Sudan for regaining their dignity and humanity. Its destruction at the hands of the NIF regime or any other Arab dominated government in Khartoum will leave a large hole in the African liberation movement. It is imperative and of paramount importance that the African governments in the Horn of Africa, Great Lakes Region and Southern Africa lend the SPLM/A support morally, politically and militarily.

The argument put forward by the Arabs, inside or outside the Sudan, that the conflict in the country is internal and therefore does not warrant concerted African support is positively dangerous. The African countries should not accept or buy this argument even for a moment. The various Arab dominated governments in Khartoum have never shied from demanding support from the Arab countries and governments in order to fight the African in the Sudan. In fact they have demanded support as a matter of right. Africa

must emulate this solidarity. It must wake up and consolidate itself if the foreign designs and ambitions are to be frustrated and defeated. Short of this support, the balance of forces could tilt dangerously in favour of the NIF regime and its Arab supporters.

A possible defeat of the SPLM/A in the South and the resistance of the African groups in the North, on account of not having received sufficient support to mobilise and galvanise the African people in the Sudan to resist Arab domination and oppression, shall have serious repercussions both internally to the Sudan and with its neighbours. This will enable the NIF government to exploit the vast natural resources in the South, including petroleum deposits, in order to build a strong economic base and a huge army – mainly from the defeated Africans – along the lines of Mahdist's state in the last century³⁵, which it can use to aggress the neighbouring African countries.

The SPLM/A and the African groups in the Sudan, and their ability to resist Arab domination, constitute the first African defence line against this Arab aggression. Once that defence line is broken, we can be sure of the results as enunciated in the words of Omer el Beshir in 1994, hoping to pray in a Kampala Mosque once the SPLA had been cleared from Nimuli.

The support for the Africans in the Sudan should be considered as part of the regional co-operation and integration in the Horn, Great Lakes Region and Southern Africa. It should translate into the establishment of a sovereign and independent New Sudan, which encompasses South Sudan (the regions of Bahr el Ghazal, Equatoria and Upper Nile), Southern Kordofan (the Nuba and Dinka Abeyei) and Southern Blue Nile (the Funj). The African people in Dar Fur have the option

of joining the New Sudan if they so wish. IGAD and the East African Community are such instruments of regional co-operation and integration.

However, this would require tagging a political agenda, which unites the Africans, to what has been up to this moment an economic and humanitarian instrument. The challenge for the realisation of these lofty ideals falls on the leaders, thinkers and political activists in the region. The strengthening economic and trade relations between the countries in the region, which of necessity must involve free movement of people and commodities, will act as a safety valve in the region against external aggression.

2. Internal Social and Democratic Reforms to Accelerate Regional Cooperation and Integration

Regional cooperation and integration would require certain fundamental changes in the political systems in the region. These will allow social and democratic changes to take place in order to accommodate popular participation in the running of their affairs. Cooperation, regional, social and economic integration processes, can be meaningful in as much as they become people driven. This cooperation and integration will minimise the competition over natural resources and will add to stability in the region.

The catchwords in this respect are 'participatory democracy' and 'democratic governance' and a responsible, conscious and vibrant civil society. In the individual countries in the region, political pluralism should not necessarily be made a condition for the consummation of this process.

However, popular participation either as authentic political parties, trade unions and civil society organisations, instead of political

exclusion, could facilitate internal harmony and nation building in the region. This will definitely deny anybody speculating on the ill fortunes of the African people. Social, democratic reforms and building of national consensus will create stable internal conditions that will permit people to build a democratic political culture. A politically stable country offers fewer opportunities for adventurers.

3. De-Arabization of Islam in Africa

Islam as a religion is not a problem. It is professed by a large section of Africans on the continent. There is even nothing wrong with its proselytisation in the Sudan and elsewhere. The contradiction between Islam arises on the basis of it being a vehicle for Arab culture and values. Not only that, Islam's incapacity for reform to meet modern times, transposes archaic pre-Islamic Arab traditions and culture on a 21st century social and political reality. This is an area of inevitable conflict and can prevent cohabitation with many African peoples.

Not every Muslim in Africa is an Arab nor aspires to be an Arab. But to be a good Muslim, fluency in Arabic is a necessity. This presupposes a process of de-Arabisation of Islam along the lines of the reformation of the church in the thirteenth century, which led to indigenisation of the Christian Church and translating the Bible from Latin to the various languages. The indigenisation of Islam and the translation of the Holy Qu'ran into the various languages, will enable the people to have access to the word of Allah through their own language, as well as Islamic perceptions closer to their cultures. In this way the local languages will be able to carry Islamic values and doctrine.

De-linking Arabism from Islam will deny the Arabs the pretext of Islamising the world,

while in fact it is arabisation. It is just the same method the Europeans used in the eighteen and nineteen centuries to colonise the continent under the pretext of spreading Christianity.³⁶ Africans need not go through this experience again. Their hard won independence and freedom should not be lost again on account of misuse of religious values and beliefs

The de-Arabisation of Islam has parallels in Islamic history itself. The fourth Khalifa, Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet, decided that future Khalifa should come from the direct family of the Prophet, doing away with the hitherto practise of the election of the Khalifa, which characterised the Umayyad dynasty. The Umayyad institutionalised Arabism into Islam. Although non-Arabs Muslims (*muwalleeen*) outnumbered the Arabs, both among the faithful and in the armies, and they dominated the Arab-Islamic empire economically and culturally until the eighth century, they were treated as slaves, violating the Islamic doctrine of equality. The growing discontent of the non-Arabs and their rebellion was responsible for the demise of the Umayyad in 750 AD. Power then passed to Khalifa Abu al Abbas, an Iraqi, thus ending the Arab domination of Islam. It was only after the de-arabisation of Islam in the eighth century that it became one of the greatest civilisations of the world. Baghdad became a world-trading centre.

De-Arabisation means indigenising Islam, which should not present a problem. Islam, in West Africa is highly indigenised and has lost much of its archaic Arab cultural characteristics. It is only now that, and because of, the influence of fundamentalist ideology that countries like Nigeria, Islamic revivalism is beginning to compete for state control. The introduction of Sharia in one of the northern states in Nigeria is an attempt by

the Muslims to monopolise the state's political power to the chagrin of the non-Muslims. A condition in which a Funj King, referred to above, claimed Arab ancestry because of being a Muslim in order to consolidate his authority, is being recreated.

The de-Arabisation of Islam would mean a complete recognition the cultural heritage of the Africans. They would be able to propagate their languages and cultural values, which they usually despise, because they have become Muslims. In the words of Cdr. Yusif Kuwa Mekki, the SPLM Governor of Southern Kordofan, himself a Muslim from the Nuba nationality,

"I only discovered that I was not an Arab in Khartoum University. All along, we have been indoctrinated that we were Arabs and the Arabs are a superior race. We were taught to despise the Nuba people; languages, cultural practices and anything that identified with the Nuba and backwardness, e.g. wrestling and drinking of 'merisa'³⁷, which are central to Nuba culture were prohibited. We are now undergoing a process of self-discovery. That is why I tell the Nuba that there is nothing wrong with drinking merisa or wrestling. Even wrestling is aired on the TV world and is a source of wealth for many sportsmen and women".

There is something in African cultures and languages that could be used to develop Islam as a faith to meet the modern aspirations of the African Muslims. The resistance to Islam in some parts of South Sudan stems from the fact that it is associated with the Arabs, who are despised as slave-traders, wanderers, intruders and enemies. The de-Arabisation therefore will serve a better purpose for Islam in Africa.

VII. Summary and Concluding Remarks

The collapse of the Soviet Union, followed by the easing of ideological tensions between the West and East and the super power rivalry, has ushered a new international political order in which the Arabs find themselves competitors for influence and domination of the world. In fact, many Arab thinkers and ideologues believe that after the collapse of the communist system, Islam is predestined by divine will to take over the leadership of the world.

As faithful adherents of Islam, the Arabs assume they are endowed with a capacity to fulfill this divine will, by war or otherwise. But, in effect, it is for their territorial aggrandisement and conquest of the world and pillage of its resources that drives them into war. It is only fortunate that they now don't possess the technology for this enterprise; otherwise the world would be really unsafe³⁸.

The Arab conquest of North Africa in the seventh century later extended into the Sudan. And this conflict has not really or completely died down. The de-colonisation of the Sudan rekindled Arab ambitions for territorial aggrandisement, putting them into direct conflict with the African peoples in the Sudan.

The present war in the Sudan, therefore, has become part of this wider Arab strategy to regain the past glory represented by their conquest of North Africa and part of Southern Europe. In this context, the issues in the Sudan today why the Arabs will not let the people of South Sudan go their way is not because of sovereignty or territorial unity and integrity of the Sudan. It is a question of retaining Arab dominance over the whole of Sudan and its human and natural resource, in order to exploit and use them to conquer more lands.

The ruling circles in Khartoum would not contemplate an independent South Sudan, a sentiment shared by the Egyptians and other Arabs, because it frustrates the Arab strategy and denies them expanding their influence into the rest of Africa. The Egyptian regime has already vowed that it will not tolerate another country on the Nile between Uganda and Northern Sudan, which explicitly means the Sudan must remain united, otherwise it goes to war to maintain that 'unity'.

It is the pretence under which the unity of the Sudan is upheld that engenders conflict and the present war is enduring because of this unity. If therefore the resolution of this conflict cannot be sought in self-determination of the South, then the intention of the Arab ruling circles is to continue the war and spill it over into the neighbouring countries of East, Central and Southern Africa. This, therefore, serves the Arab strategy for conquering, Islamising and Arabising Africa.

Having resisted this Arab onslaught almost silently for a long time, perhaps the South Sudanese, already showing fatigue³⁹, are extending the challenge to their African brothers and sisters. Whether or not the Africans will permit the Arabs to run over the continent, once their brothers and sisters in the Sudan have been defeated and conquered, is in the balance. It is now or never. It is up to the African political elite, intellectuals, thinkers and activists to take up this challenge and face

it.

Africa, therefore, on the eve of the 21st century presents a dismal picture. Although, she has succeeded to ward off white man's Apartheid in South Africa, the Arabs present a formidable challenge in the north. Like our forefathers, we should not relent, but must deepen our awareness, organisational capabilities, capacity to resist and solidarity with each other. It is through regional cooperation, and social and economic integration that the African states can improve the lots of their peoples to build stronger economies capable of delivering goods and satisfying the needs of their people. This must be predicated on democracy and good governance, which will ensure internal stability and peace in the region.

In conclusion, I emphasise the assertion once more that the Arab 'threat' to black Africa is real. Its potentials increase as you move up the African map from the South. It will be criminal for the African political leadership, thinkers, activists, and statesmen to ignore this danger because of their liberal ideas or because they can't immediately perceive it. On the contrary, the people should be prepared, through concrete political, social and economic measures that principally aim at improving the quality of life in Africa and raising their awareness and a sense of solidarity.

NOTES

1. A paper submitted to the workshop: Africa on the eve of the 21st century: Between War and Peace. Zanzibar Serena Hotel, November 8th. - 9th. 1999.
2. Contact address: Larjour Consultancy, P.O. Box 8731 Nairobi, Kenya. Tel: 254 2 711118 Fax: 254 2 724449. ochaw@iconnect.co.ke
3. A group of political parties, trade unions and regional groups formed in 1990 following the military coup of the National Islamic Front against the elected government of Sadiq el Mahdi on June 30th, 1989. The SPLM/A

- joined the NDA in December 1990.
4. Cases of slavery and trafficking in slaves have been widely reported and documented. Examples of these documentation: Ushari and Baldo Suleiman. *The Dhaein Massacre*. Khartoum University Press. (1987), The Christian Solidarity International reports, the reports of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in the Sudan.
 5. Egypt, in spite of its ideological and political differences with the NIF regime, has spearheaded a campaign to prevent the conflict in the Sudan being put on the political agenda of the OAU and the UN. In addition, it is responsible for opposing and bursting the UN sanctions and arms embargo on the regime following the assassination attempt in Addis Ababa, June 1995, on the life of the Egyptian President. Iraq supplied the regime with military hardware including chemical weapons. Yemen recently (September 1999) passed over to the NIF regime in the Sudan over 200 Czechs made tanks it had purchased. Arab solidarity with the Sudan in the political, economic and military spheres has been enormous.
 6. Fouad Ajami. *The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice since 1967*. Cambridge University Press. 1993. P.48.
 7. Moamer Gadhafi recently confirmed this to an Arab audience in a rally in Khartoum North.
 8. Sharif Harir. *Arab Belt vs. African Belt: Ethno-political conflict in Dar Fur and the Regional Cultural Factors*. In, Sharif Harir and Terje Tvedt (Eds.). *Short Cut to Decay – The Case of Sudan*. Nordiska Afrikaninstitutet. Uppsala. 1994. Pp.144-185.
 9. Nimeri executed Mahmoud Mohammed Tah, the leader of the Republican Brothers, in 1985 on account of apostasy.
 10. While there is a huge Islamic centre in Rome, near the Vatican (the heart of Christendom), reflecting the West's liberalism and ability to tolerate other faiths in its midst, a similar gesture is impossible to go by and allow the Christian church in Saudi Arabia, let alone in Mecca or Medina.
 11. In an Islamic state, a non-Muslim is not a citizen but a protected person (dhimmi) on paying special tax. The social position of a dhimmi is lower than that of women and therefore such a person cannot aspire to leadership positions. Dr. Boutrus Boutrus Ghali, the former UN Secretary General, rose only to the post of a deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs in his country. He could not become full Minister, although he did perform efficiently and effectively those duties, because he was a Christian Copt. In the Sudan, George Kongor Arop, remains Second Vice President of the Republic. It is impossible for him to become the First Vice President, which would enable him assume the presidency.
 12. Even the Communist Party of the Sudan, the first to recognise the historical, ethnic, cultural, linguistic difference between the North and South Sudan, attaches impossible conditions to the exercise by the South of this right to self determination.
 13. In fact the initiative endorses the strategy of Hassan el Turabi for reconciliation of the NIF regime with the northern political parties in opposition, notably the Umma and the Democratic Unionist parties.
 14. The NIF has been supplying logistical support to the remnants of these forces together with the Rwandan Interahamwe from Juba, flying its planes over the SPLA liberated areas in western Equatoria. Intelligence reports indicate the presence of very senior Sudanese military personnel with these rebels groups.
 15. Dar Fur became part of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan in 1917 following the defeat of the Fur Sultanate and the killing of Sultan Ali Dinar in 1916. Sudan eastern borders with Ethiopia were consolidated only in 1920 in the aftermath of the British – Anyuak war.
 16. The cultural and linguistic homogeneity of the north, hitherto taken for granted, is now shattered and has been exposed to question by the raging conflict between the Arab peoples supported by the central government in Khartoum on the one hand, and the African peoples of Dar Fur in the west and the Beja peoples in the east on the other hand.
 17. Some African Muslims in the north have now rediscovered themselves and are working hard to re-define themselves.
 18. The resolution of the SPLM's First National

- Convention. Chukudum, 1994.
19. Anthony Nutting. *The Arabs*. Mentor. 1964. P. 59.
 20. Bat Ye'or, *'The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam: From Jihad to Dhimmitude'*. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press. 1996, pp. 48
 21. Mohammed Ali Pasha to the Defterdar, as he was leaving on an expedition to the Sudan, 23rd September 1825.
 22. H. A. MacMichael. *A History of the Arabs in Sudan*. Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. Vol. 1. Pp. 138.
 23. P. M. Holt. *A Modern History of the Sudan*. Weidenfeld & Nicholson. 1961. Pp. 16-32.
 24. H.A. MacMichael. *Op Cit*. pp. 14
 25. ditto.
 26. Sultan Abdel Magid reporting back to Mohammed Ali Pasha, 13th February 1841.
 27. The mutiny in Torit (August 1955) is considered the beginning of the war and the Addis Ababa Agreement (March 1972) between the SSLM and Nimeri, the end of that war.
 28. The 'Gulf War' is a pointer in this respect.
 29. Islamic cultural centres dot cities and towns in East and Central Africa as manifestation of Arab aid to these countries.
 30. The defeat of the Arab dominated government in Khartoum leading to the creation of the New Sudan can easily provoke an Egyptian intervention.
 31. Jean-Francois Bayart, Stephen Ellis and Beatrice Hibou, *The Criminalisation of the State in Africa*. James Curry. Oxford. 1999, Pp. 19.
 32. The destruction of the Kigali Curio shops near the Gamia Mosque in Nairobi and the throwing out of business of the owners in 1998 was intended to heighten the contradiction between curio owners and the state.
 33. In 570 AD, the year of the birth of Prophet Mohammed, Abraha Ashram, the Abyssinian governor of Yemen attacked Makka with the objective of bring it under his rule. Ever since the rise of Islam, the Arabs were trying, without success, to conquer, arabise and islamise Abyssinia. The Qu'ran: Surat el Fil. 105: 1-5
 34. A NDP motion of no confidence against the Vice President, George Saitoti, failed to garner enough support and was therefore defeated because of ethnic machinations that brought together some members of the opposition and the ruling party to defeat the motion.
 35. Khalifa Abdullahi el Tahisha drew his huge slave army from the African peoples in the West, East and South Sudan. This was partly because these peoples did not support themselves to resist enslavement because they were found hostile to each other. What is important here is that they were all used against Abyssinia in a war of conquest that led to the killing of King Yohannes IV.
 36. In the words of Jomo Kenyatta, "The white man came to Kenya carrying a Bible. He then taught us to bow our heads in prayer. And while we bowed our heads in prayer, he took our land."
 37. Beer brewed from sorghum or corn.
 38. If one is assured of heaven then nothing would inhibit one from carrying out the will of God, including the manufacture of an 'Islamic atomic bomb'.
 39. The signs of fatigue are: large numbers of South Sudanese are seeking resettlement in America, Australia and Europe, capitulation to the enemy by some senior leaders, inter-tribal conflicts and wars etc.

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