

with the GOS were joining forces with the "main rebel faction in the south". That is, they declared their intention to fight alongside the SPLA in Upper Nile, against the GOS.

The re-alignment of basically Nuer militias was clearly linked to oil, and its importance is underscored by the fact that the militias were at one time intended by the GOS to provide security for the oilfields themselves.

There is a war going on in Unity State/Western Upper Nile, a small one, but a deadly one. The Humanitarian Co-ordination Unit of the UN in Khartoum put out a Situation Report on the area on October 16, 1999: "The oil field near Rigat was reportedly attacked a week ago and an unknown number of people killed. There are reports of Nhialdu being attacked, shelling in Bentiu, further gunship reinforcements and bombings taking place. Road communications between Bentiu and Rubkona have been cut. There are reports of landmines between Rubkona and Tongat. Tong is reportedly occupied. The security level of Western Upper Nile locations is at 'red no go'."

One week later, a press release was issued from the "General Headquarters of the South Sudan Defence Force". It said, in part, that "fighting had also flared up in Leer on October 18, 1999, under overall Commander Tito Biel Choir and under the direct operational command of Cdr. Peter Par Jiek. It is crystal clear that the GOS's policy is genocidal geared to wipe out or incapacitate the civilian population in Western Upper Nile so that the GOS and its constituents can exploit the oil without resistance." The Nuer militia commanders we met want the oilfields shut down, and if it cannot be accomplished diplomatically, they say they are prepared to attempt it militarily.

The 1990's have not been kind to either the Nuer or the Dinka. Earlier rivalries aside, in 1991, the SPLA, which had driven the Sudanese army out of most of the South, exploded into warring factions. The conflict became a violent full-scale one between the Nuer and the Dinka, and reached the point where some analysts believe that the number who have died in this conflict exceeds the number killed by the Sudanese army.

By June 1998, Nuer and Dinka chiefs were convinced that peace between Nuer and Dinka was now possible. The Dinka-Nuer Peace and Reconciliation Conference held in February/March, 1999 at Wunlit was the next logical step and a success. Among the declarations: that border grazing lands and fishing grounds shall be available immediately as shared resources. And: that all hostile acts shall cease between Dinka and Nuer whether between their respective military forces or armed civilians.

The moves towards peace between Dinka and Nuer seem real, if always fragile, and this eventuality has never been viewed with equanimity in Khartoum. Added to this must be the information that when Riek Machar sent a brief to President Bashir on May 25, 1999, listing violations of the Peace Agreement, he objected to "doubts being cast on the Wunlit Conference", and asked President Bashir what "is the destiny of peace from within in light of a position against the Wunlit Conference? What are the ways to reach comprehensive peace if we set aside internal