



*Farce Majeure* is a comprehensive critique, based largely on Hoile's previously published articles, of the Clinton administration's Sudan policy. Hoile, who has specialized in Sudanese issues for several years, argues that the Clinton administration succeeded in two areas with respect to its policy: preventing a peaceful resolution of the Sudanese civil war, and succeeding in the propaganda war, at least in North America. Hoile then explores how and why this was achieved and helps the reader to understand how Sudan moved from being an insignificant African state, at least from a western vantage point, into a nation constantly in the international limelight.

Chapter 1 provides a good, albeit brief, analysis of the evolving relationship between the US and Africa's largest country, since its independence in 1956. Granted that the book's focus is the period from 1993 to 2000, readers could have benefited from a more extensive discussion of the historical context. In chapters 1 and 5 the author identifies what may be at the root of American aversion to Sudan:

... the independent stance of the Sudanese government, and the threat that a modern, democratic and republican Islamic model [poses] to America's absolutist and authoritarian allies in the Middle East.

Hoile dismisses US claims that Sudan is a hotbed of Islamic extremism as "simply not borne out by reality." He summarizes evidence from the media and from experts to debunk American claims that Sudan is a threat to everything for which the West or the civilized world stands. Sudan's Islamist agenda is unlike others – and far from the anti-modern image painted by the US – due to its acceptance of liberal democracy and its emphasis on women "playing a full part in building the new society."

Despite the lack of evidence, Clinton officials, including Assistant Secretary of State at the time, Susan Rice, claimed that Sudan is "perhaps the world's worst" human rights violator. Chapter 2 discusses the mechanics of how Washington achieved the alienation of Sudan – managing perceptions, dividing and conquering, relegating the country to the diplomatic isolation ward, tightening the economic screws and getting others to fight its war.

The book argues that the focal point of the policy on Sudan is its classification as a haven for terrorists. Chapter 3 explores the administration's abuse of anti-terrorism legislation beginning with Khartoum's inclusion on the State Department's list of countries sponsoring terrorists in 1993. Despite being added to the list without a "single example of Sudanese involvement in any act of international terrorism," Sudan has gone above

and beyond what most other countries have done in tackling terrorism. It risked its own security, attracting the potential wrath of terrorists, by turning over the elusive international terrorist Carlos the Jackal in 1994. In 1995, it reimposed the requirements for a visa for Arab visitors after the administration charged that the country had become “a viper’s nest of terrorists.” In 1996, at the request of the United States, the Sudanese government expelled Bin Laden and about 100 of his men and their dependents. After the Nairobi bombings, the Sudanese even expelled a number of men allegedly associated with Bin Laden for tailing US Embassy personnel. What does it take for the United States to begin to reciprocate beyond the imposition of sanctions and isolation?

Chapter 3 also deals with the al-Shifa factory bombing fiasco, which many officials claimed was necessary because of Sudan’s support of terrorists. Hoile shows how Clinton’s spin-doctors had to come up with lie after lie to justify the bombing. There were numerous flaws, inconsistencies and inaccuracies in the US position, and the “American intelligence claims about the al-Shifa factory fell by the wayside one by one.” Hoile notes that, far from isolating Sudan, the attack on the al-Shifa factory “led to an unprecedented level of international support and sympathy [for Sudan] ... as well as strengthening the government domestically.”

Chapter 4 highlights the US’s systemic intelligence failure. The chapter documents how Khartoum went out of its way to show the country’s willingness to fight terrorism when Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir wrote a letter to President Clinton in 1997 offering to allow US intelligence, law enforcement and counter-terrorism experts to enter the country. Hoile states that a similar letter was reportedly written to the FBI in 1998. The FBI rejected the offer in June 1998, about two months before the attack on the al-Shifa factory. Hoile also documents how – to the dismay of Kenya – the US passed up Khartoum’s offers to welcome American investigators into the country to investigate the Nairobi Embassy bombings and to interrogate two suspects picked up by Sudanese officials on their own initiative. The US’s rejection of Khartoum’s offer to cooperate in the intelligence area appears to be more significant today. *Farce Majeure* suggests that Osama Bin Laden was under some restrictions in Sudan. In fact, his expulsion to a lawless Afghanistan may have given him the opportunity and freedom to organize and consolidate his power.

*Farce Majeure* makes it clear that the lack of US personnel in the country has made it almost impossible to gather intelligence. Moreover, the

book asks how much credibility can be given to intelligence gathered from exiles, opposition groups, and neighboring governments. In fact, Hoile points out that the CIA has had experience with bad intelligence from the country for a number of years and even had to destroy over 100 intelligence reports in 1996 after discovering they were fabrications.

Chapter 6 deals with the explosive issue of Sudan and slavery. The groups protesting the loudest about slavery in Sudan are Christian “humanitarian” and missionary outfits. They have contributed to the mess and confusion surrounding Sudan. In what can only be characterized as a revival of the Crusader mentality, these groups operate on the premise that Christianity’s growth and spread is great for the people, but Islamization of the north, where the vast majority are Muslims live, is synonymous with human rights abuses. It is no secret that some humanitarian organizations have funded rebels, while others such as Christian Solidarity International have spread exaggerated news about slavery and the extent of human rights abuses.

Hoile marshals evidence from various sources to dismiss the allegations. He argues that what is being labelled as slavery is the continuation of a longstanding practice of inter-tribal hostage taking which may be exacerbated by the civil war. It is unclear what role groups such as Christian Solidarity International and others have had in promoting and perhaps even reviving the practice by diverting aid money to “free” these “slaves.” Nevertheless, due to the importance given to these allegations by the anti-Sudan forces, Hoile should have provided a more detailed analysis of this issue. This is one area that could have benefited greatly from some field or original research.

Chapters 7 and 11 explore the manipulative and selective use of humanitarian groups in Sudan by the US administration. Hoile argues that the American allegations stating that the Khartoum government is interfering with aid to the south of the country are false. The reader is encouraged to wonder how a government that has been unable to control a foreign-financed rebel movement, and that is not in control of the entire nation, can be accountable for what happens in the whole country.

One criticism of this discussion is that the argument would flow better if the two chapters were merged into one. The same criticism can be made of chapter 8, which is an extremely short look at how Sudan’s policy of neutrality on the Gulf War was used against it by the US. This chapter could have been incorporated easily into one of the other chapters.

Hoile writes that the Clinton administration openly made known its goal of destabilizing this country, which is made up of more than 450 ethnic groups and tribes. Chapters 9 and 10 assess the extent of this strategy, which has involved supporting rebel groups as well as encouraging Uganda, Eritrea, and Ethiopia to destabilize their neighbor. In pursuing this goal, the administration has supported John Garang's Sudan Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA), which Amnesty International accused of having "ethnically cleansed Nuer and other civilians suspected of supporting the other faction."

In the last two chapters, Hoile concludes that the Clinton administration obstructed peace in Sudan and argues that dialogue must now be initiated. One significant result of the misinformation and demonization is the poor understanding of Sudan that is prevalent in the US Congress. The book makes a number of recommendations including, *inter alia*, reestablishing diplomatic contact, lifting sanctions, working for peace in the country and removing Khartoum from the list of terrorist supporters. One can only wonder whether the Bush administration wants to learn from Clinton's mistakes or repeat them.

One criticism that will haunt this book is the allegation that the author is a paid spokesman for the Sudanese government. Critics claim that Hoile once worked for Westminster Associates, contracted in 1996 to improve Sudan's international public image. Moreover, they also allege that the two groups he is involved with, namely, the British-Sudanese Public Affairs Council and the European-Sudanese Public Affairs Council, are both mouthpieces for the Sudanese administration. Despite these clouds, this reviewer found the book a valuable resource based on its own merit.

The book could have benefited from more thorough discussion of the historical context and the slavery issue. Nevertheless, the book makes the information accessible in one well-organized work. *Farce Majeure* is highly recommended reading for anyone seeking information on the situation in Sudan, particularly given the fact that some in the Bush administration are eyeing Sudan as a target in its war on terrorism.

Faisal Kutty  
Master of Law Candidate  
Osgoode Hall Law School  
York University  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada