

The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) has succeeded in fully liberating the whole of Western Equatoria. The fall of Bo, the last remaining Government of Sudan (GOS) garrison in the province makes Western Equatoria the first province of Sudan from which all the National Islamic Front (NIF) Arab forces have been eradicated. The distinctive red cross on blue and white Christian flags are now flying all over Western Equatoria.

The dramatic SPLA offensive, "Operation Thunderbolt," which began on 9 March 1997 defeated several GOS divisions and overran the network of Muslim garrisons, from Amadi and Lui to the important road junction at Jambo to the strategic town of Yei, the key border towns of Kaya and Kajo-Keji, the heavily fortified Lainya and the garrisons at Goja, Boje and Moga. This successful series of military thrusts was decisive as it firmly placed under SPLA control all the south western approaches to the Southern capital of Juba.



SPLA soldiers look towards the Arab garrison town of Amadi
These men overwhelmed the base in a ferocious one hour battle

With the beginning of the rainy season the swollen Kit River proved to be a considerable natural obstacle to the further advance of the SPLA forces – especially as the GOS forces had blown up the bridge. During April, however, the SPLA forces, under Commander Mayardit managed to cross the Kit River and launched a series of lightning strikes against 4 GOS bases. The Arab forces fled in disarray and the SPLA have now advanced to within sight (and shelling range) of Juba.

The only outposts near Juba still under GOS control (at the time of writing) are Rejaf and Rokon. Three thousand troops from the defector Rieck Machar's SSIM forces (which have now joined the GOS), which were sent from Upper Nile to help defend Juba, were intercepted and defeated by the SPLA. The SSIM suffered heavy losses and the survivors fled in disarray.

The SPLA offensive has also isolated the GOS garrison towns in Eastern Equatoria, Torit and Kapoeta, which can only be supplied by air drops. These air drops can only be sustained for as long as the Juba air base is able to operate. Juba itself is now cut off, with the SPLA controlling the road routes and threatening the Nile river route from Bor.

New Offensives Launched in Bahr-El-Ghazal and Red Sea

With the GOS distracted by the threat to their Southern capital of Juba, the SPLA suddenly launched another offensive in May, (Operation Deng Nhial) which captured the towns of Tonj, Warrap, Rumbeck and Gogrial in Bahr-El-Ghazal province. Rumbeck fell on 1st May after an intensive 1 hour battle. Tonj was subdued in just 30 ferocious minutes, a few days later.

At the same time the SPLA, with their new northern allies in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), also made major advances in Eastern Sudan. The SPLA/NDA Red Sea Offensive overran all the GOS garrisons between Tokar and the Red Sea, including: Algiekh, Atirabi, Migileen, Bitay and Ateek.

Significantly, the tone of the NIF regime's propaganda from Khartoum has changed quite

dramatically. The NIF spokesmen are now saying that their (GOS) forces are “holding their own” rather than the earlier “repelling the invaders”! The public is being prepared for future defeats and there is a continuous appeal for citizens to enrol in the Popular Defence Force (PDF) militia.

The minister for Information, El Tayeb Mohamed Kheir, has been forced to admit that the GOS is facing some serious “difficulties” in the East. Kheir stressed that the fall of the threatened Tokar would not mean that (the absolutely vital road, rail and sea lifeline for Sudan) Port Sudan would be on the brink of falling. Because, he noted, Tokar is 200 kilometres from Port Sudan! Observers have concluded that the NIF is apparently depending more upon geographic distances than on any military abilities of its armed forces to protect their dictatorship!

At the time of writing of this report, SPLA forces were also threatening the very strategic railway junction town of Wau in Bahr-EI-Ghazal and the hydro-electric power station at the dam near Damazin on the Blue Nile. Reportedly this hydro-electric dam provides more than 80% of the electricity for the national capital, Khartoum.

War Intensifies in the Nuba Mountains

With the liberation of so many key towns in Western Equatoria and Bahr-EI-Ghazal, the SPLA will also be able to resupply their beleaguered forces cut off in the Nuba Mountains for over 12 years – once the dry season comes in October/November. Perhaps because of this threat, the NIF forces have intensified their efforts to annihilate the Nuba people.

Against all odds, the SPLA in the Nuba have succeeded in repulsing six of the eight massive military columns recently sent into the Nuba Mountains. However, the 2 GOS columns which got through devastated many villages, burning crops, vandalising churches, destroying villages, looting livestock and murdering many villagers.



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