

On Safari in Sudan

Khartoum, Sudan, the largest country in Africa (one-quarter the size of Canada), is bordered by nine neighbours and the Red Sea. It's also home to much of the Nile River. The continent's Arabic and African cultures meet up here also. Sudan, in short, is a fairly strategic location. And throughout much of 2004, Sudan, and in particular its western Darfur region, was the humanitarian crisis news story. It remains so today, largely because of the scale of human disaster and atrocities committed there, as well as the intractable nature of that regional conflict.

However, as bad as this situation has been, sustained news focus on Darfur largely obscured an even greater internal conflict and humanitarian disaster within Sudan – a more than two-decade long civil war between its Islamic North and its Animist/Christian South. By contrast, this other conflict – the longest in recent African experience – displaced more than 4,000,000 Sudanese within their own country and through a combination of starvation and disease, killed a further 2,000,000 people over that period. As with Darfur, the North-South civil war was the result of the prolonged economic and political marginalization of Sudan's outlying regions by Khartoum's ruling elite, and also from the government's forced attempts to officially impose Islamic Shari'a law upon non-Muslims in Southern Sudan.

Thankfully, as 2004 gave way to 2005, considerable political efforts from within, combined with considerable international pressure applied on both Sudan's military-led government and the southern rebel opposition, resulted in a long-overdue Comprehensive Peace Agreement formally ending Sudan's civil war on January 9th. Getting to that North-South peace accord, however, was a tortuous process, and one for which the Canadian Forces last summer established another small 'footprint' mission in Africa.

Dubbed "Operation Safari," this is one of several CF missions in Africa, the others being Op Crocodile (8 CF members in the Democratic Republic of the Congo), Op Reptile (3 CF personnel in Sierra Leone), and Op Sculpture (8 CF members in Sierra Leone). Op Safari was initiated late last July with the dispatch of two CF members to the Sudanese capital, Khartoum – Warrant Officer Bob Moug from 1 Canadian Air Division HQ in

Winnipeg, and myself – where we served within the military component of the special political United Nations Advance Mission in Sudan, UNAMIS.

This mission was originally mandated to prepare for an expected follow-on UN military peace support operation mission in Southern Sudan and *not* for the separate Darfur conflict. Recognizing the need to provide resources specifically dedicated to the Darfur situation, however, another mission consisting of two additional CF planners, Op Augural, was subsequently established to assist the African Union mission in Darfur, with those members working from the AU's headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Our work, essentially, boiled down to providing the mission's senior civilian political and military leadership with military, political and security situation reporting as well as situational awareness of media coverage. Along with some 24 other military colleagues from 14 different nations, our military component watched and hoped for a political solution to Sudan's North-South civil war.

The cultural breadth of the Sudanese people and the seemingly never-quite-definite political developments made it a fascinating, albeit often frustrating situation to follow. Being at the proverbial eye of an international political storm meant that our small mission served as a worthwhile contribution to Canada's monitoring of the situation, one that provided a regular reading of the pulse of Sudan's complex condition back to Ottawa.

After biding the time that it took for a political solution to be agreed upon between Sudan's North and South, the next crucial international step finally arrived on March 24th, 2005 with the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1590 mandating the stand-up of the UN

Mission In Sudan (UNMIS). In the weeks since then, the transition from UNAMIS to a military peace support operation proper is at last getting under way in earnest. By the time all the proverbial foreign 'boots on the ground' are in place throughout southern Sudan – a massive deployment expected to require well over half a year to complete before it's fully operational – UNMIS will number up to 10,000 personnel, consisting of both enabling units as well as protection forces to support between 700-800 military observers charged with carrying out a ceasefire monitoring and verification duty in Sudan's South.

Those monitors and soldiers will be contributed largely by Asian and African nations. While those soldiers will be engaged in six sectors throughout the Southern operational area, Canada continues to be involved. This next Op Safari rotation includes the Deputy Force Commander, a position being filled by Brigadier-General Gregory Mitchell, an RCR officer who also currently serves as the Commander of the Hovelte, Denmark-based SHIRBRIG formation, the multinational Standby Force High Readiness Brigade for UN operations.

Joining BGen Mitchell will be other CF personnel occupying a variety of positions, such as operations, logistics, movements control, and headquarters staff leadership and administration. A further 12 CF personnel may potentially deploy into southern Sudan as part of the military observer contingent.

There are 16 currently-deployed CF operations around the world at this time, most of them similarly small missions, Op Safari is another instance of Canada's military playing to its strengths – foremost among which is the experience and capability of the individual men and women that are sent to help make a difference however they can. In short, Op Safari is about the CF being dispatched to those operational hot spots where Canada and its military can make a meaningful difference and, in the bargain, leave another part of the world somewhat better off than before. **FL**

Major James Simiana works within the J5PA section of the ADM (Public Affairs) Group at NDHQ. A 15-year member of the Canadian Forces, he has previously deployed to Croatia and Bosnia. He returned from his Sudan deployment in January 2005, followed by WO Moug in mid-March.