

REVIEW ESSAY

A Mercenary Author for Hire

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Darfur In Perspective. By David Hoile. 2005 The European-Sudanese Public Affairs Council (ESPCA).

The British writer and “activist” David Hoile launched a new publication on Sudan in 2005. This work comes under the title, *Darfur In Perspective*, and is published by his own London-based Organisation. Sifting through the analysis of the book, the reader would be forgiven for concluding that the book is either an evil joke or otherwise a work commissioned by the like of Musa Hilal, the notorious Darfur Janjaweed (Arab Militia) leader, whose name is certain to top the UN list for Darfur war criminals.

It is unconventional for academics to dwell too much on the personalities of the authors of books that they review. However, since Mr. Hoile claims to be a peace activist (and that his work on Darfur develops from this commitment), so it is legitimate to review his biography before we look into his thesis. So who is David Hoile and what the nature of the organisation, ESPAC, that he heads?

The eminent Sudan analyst Eric Reeves says the following about Mr. Hoile.

Mr, Hoile has used a variety of organizations to give apparent substance to his interminable propaganda efforts. In addition to “The European-Sudanese Public Affairs Council,” he also uses the name “British-Sudanese Public Affairs Council,” and “Westminster Associates”. The latter is important because, as the authoritative Africa Confidential has revealed in its most recent issue (Vol 42, No 17), “the Parliamentary register of interests lists the client of [Westminster Associates] as the Sudan government.” [Reeves 2001]

But Mr Hoile’s notoriety is not new. In his college time in Warwick, the Federation of Conservative Students (FCS), which he chaired, was disbanded for its ultra rightwing views. Even former British Conservative Party chairman Norman Tebbit, whose conservative credentials are impeccable, described the FCS as “too barking right wing” (Norman 2001).

But the lunacy of Mr. Hoile is even worse as Hyde narrates,

The Guardian has two photographs: one of David Hoile, wearing a tie with an odd appendage; the second photograph is a close up of the image appended to the tie. It is a picture of Nelson Mandela: below it are the words; “Hang Nelson Mandela and All ANC Terrorists. They are Butchers.” [Hyde 2001]

Nonetheless, the Khartoum government and the now-defunct Apartheid Regime of South Africa are not the only beneficiaries of Mr. Hoile's services. Pallister of the Guardian reports that, "Mr. Hoile has in the past allied himself with a number of unsavoury rebel and terrorist groups; the contras in Nicaragua, Renamo in Mozambique and Unita in Angola" (Pallister 2003).

The dubious connection of Mr Hoile with the no less dubious Khartoum government is also well documented. Throwing light on this connection, Sudan Update reports, "Mr Hoile also worked for Westminster Associates, contracted in 1996 to improve Sudan's international public image. He now heads the equally pro-NIF 'British-Sudanese Public Affairs Council' and 'European-Sudanese Public Affairs Council'" (Sudan Update 2005).

Using a much more powerful source, Pallister further exposes the mercenary adventures of Mr Hoile: Shortly after Mr Hoile set up the European-Sudanese Public Affairs Council, Lord Avebury, chairman of the parliamentary human rights group, said in a Lords debate, "It is believed Mr Hoile receives all his money from the Sudanese government. I hope that those who receive his literature will take careful note of that" (Pallister 2005).

Well, Mr Hoile objects, but only to a limited degree. Perhaps some but not all his funding comes from the Government of Sudan, or, as he says "he has been paid only for consultancy work" (Ibid). One wonders whether the rest of his remuneration comes from the notorious oil company, Talisman Energy, Canada, with which Mr Hoile is also connected. Reeves also writes about this connection,

Talisman Energy of Canada sees something of value in David Hoile's perceptions; they have used his materials in communicating with the news media about the situation in Sudan, where they are the direct beneficiaries of the scorched-earth warfare that has been so authoritatively established. Mr Hoile's propagandistic denials of these realities are evidently just what they want to hear. Perhaps in their views of Africa, they share more yet with this profiteering bit of human viciousness. [Reeves 2001]

Contrition, however, is not in Mr. Hoile's nature. Nonetheless, the imminent UN investigation of Darfur atrocities might provide him with an opportunity for repentance. Let us then see what he has to say about Darfur.

Hoile's Thesis

So what is the thesis put forward by the author in explaining Darfur crisis? It is nothing but the usual views, if not outright propaganda, presented by Khartoum government. In a nutshell, Hoile says that the Darfur crisis has nothing to do with marginalisation of Darfur; that it is precipitated by foreign powers; that the US and the international NGOs have a role and vested interest in the eruption and continuation of the crisis; that Darfur armed Movements do not want peace; that Darfur war is waged by the Popular Congress Party of Turabi, as a strategy to get back to power in Khartoum; that the international community and the UN have treated Khartoum government

unfairly; that the government of Khartoum has conducted the war in a reasonable and responsible manner; and that the government's bombardment of civilian locations is justified and not dissimilar from US attacks on civilian enclaves in Iraq. There is no mention, never mind condemnation, of the atrocities committed by the government or its Janjaweed allies. That is not surprising as Hoile's mission seems to be to defend Khartoum's role in the Darfur crisis.

The denial of the marginalisation of Darfur region has been the hallmark of Hoile's thesis. On the contrary, he gives a portrait of Darfur as a region that is experiencing significant level of development. That he does by simply regurgitating the government's praise of its developmental policies in Darfur (Hoile 2005:11-12). He then goes further to corroborate his point by referring to various experts in the field. For example he quotes the human rights activist, Ghazzi Suleiman, "The conflict in Darfur has nothing to do with marginalisation or the inequitable distribution of wealth" (Ibid 13). Surprisingly, Suleiman has many other statements that are damning to Khartoum's policies in Darfur that Hoile conveniently chooses to ignore. A Report by the Sudan's Human Rights organisation (Sudan Organisation Against Torture; SOAT), which Suleiman, heads reads:

The Government has practised the policy of 'starve your dog, and it will follow you' with the citizens of Darfur. People lack the very means of life, such as drinking water, food and medical treatment. In short, they lack every service crucial for human existence. This is the reality of day-to-day life despite the promises which all the administrators made personally during their rare visits to Darfur. [SOAT 1998]

The marginalisation of Darfur – along with other regions in Sudan- is well documented in the Darfur Movements' major publication "the Black Book" (The Black Book 2004). Similar information is equally available in many authoritative writings on Darfur. However, the fear that this marginalisation might eventually lead to war in Darfur was also brought formally to the attention of Khartoum Government as far back as 1999. The reminder came in a form of a memorandum to the President signed by 1300 Darfur dignitaries. Whether marginalisation warrants going to war or not is a separate matter. Its simple denial, as Hoile does, is simply cannot be taken as anything other than wilful blindness.

Having denied that marginalisation of Darfur is behind the war, Hoile then launches his own conclusions. Namely, that the Popular Congress Party instigated the war in Darfur, in its futile attempt to hit back at the Government and restore Turabi to power in Khartoum. Hoile again turns to various sources including the Government as well as other "experts" like Suleiman for support (ex. Time 2004, Al-Ahram 2004 and ICG 2004). Referring to the war in Darfur, Suleiman reportedly says:

It is a struggle to seize power in Khartoum, and the battlefield is in Darfur ... Turabi is the mastermind of the existing conflict in Darfur. If he is released and if the government tries to come to an agreement with him he will stop what is going on in Darfur in a week. [Hoile 2005:16]

Suleiman has certainly earned a good reputation as a human right activist and the role he played in that field over the last decade in Sudan is admirable. Nonetheless, if the quotation is accurate, Suleiman reduces himself to no more than an amateur political analyst. To assume that Dr. Turabi has the power to stop the war in Darfur in a week, when the international community has failed to do so in years is simply bizarre. But in some ways, both Hoile and Suleiman are simply repeating the Government's doctrine:

Sudanese Interior Minister.... Admitted as much: The Popular Congress (of Turabi) is involved in the incidences in Darfur and the JEM (Justice and Equality Movement) is just another face of the Popular Congress. The Governor of Darfur Stated that the Justice and Equality Movement was the military wing of the Popular Congress. [Hoile 2005:20]

The claim that Darfur war is the work of Turabi and his Islamist party faces another challenge as well. The numbers simply do not add up at all. Together with so many other sources, Hoile admits that, of the two Darfur Movements, JEM is the smallest. This face, however, does not seem to sway him from arguing that Darfur war can be reduced to a struggle between Islamist factions in Khartoum. Neither is the fact that there is a close relationship between the SPLM of the Southern Sudan and Darfur's Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM). To make matters more difficult for Hoile's thesis, both the SPLM and SLM are not sympathetic, and are often antagonistic and hostile, to the Islamic political movement in the Sudan.

The alleged connection between JEM and Turabi's deposition from power is further betrayed by the sequence of events in the Sudan. While the formation of JEM and the SLM was formally announced in the year 2001, the establishment of JEM preceded the announcement by several years. JEM grew up as a clandestine organisation long before the onset of the intense power struggle between Albashir and his former master Turabi. The evidence for that is the compilation of the Black Book that Hoile himself credits to JEM activists. The Black Book took several years to prepare and was initiated in and around 1997, an era in which Turabi was at the pinnacle of his power in Khartoum Palace.

There can be no doubt that many of JEM leaders were once active with Turabi and later Turabi and Albashir's Islamic Front that preceded the formation of the Popular Congress and the National Congress Parties – of Turabi and Albashir respectively. It is also safe to assume that many of them learnt their ABCs of politics under the auspices of Turabi. Nonetheless, many other senior leaders of JEM, the authors of this piece included, were affiliates of other Sudanese parties across the board and ranging in colour from the Umma Party to the Sudanese Communist party. In fact the Islamic Front was only the last station for young Darfurian politicians in their search for a suitable political party. Moreover, the alienation and subsequent defection of Darfur politicians from Sudanese Islamic parties did not begin with Turabi and Albashir split over power. It started as early as late 1980s and well prior to Albashir's accession to power. Both Daoud Boulad and Farouq Adam serve

here as a good example. The former left the Islamic Front to the SPLM and was executed for its cause while the latter left the same Islamists as a member of parliament to join the Unionist Democratic Party.

Hoile's allegation that JEM is an affiliate or the military wing of the Popular Congress Party must come as a flattering revelation to Turabi and his associates. Nonetheless, it makes poor logic. Following the turn of global and national events regarding militant Islam, Turabi's party is left in total disarray. Turabi's threat to bring the streets of Khartoum out to his defence proved to be empty talk that failed to translate into action. Turabi may have had a formidable past but has certainly little clout when it comes to present and future politics in Sudan. The position of JEM in Sudan's politics sharply contrasts that. Whether Hoile and his masters in Khartoum Palace concede or not, JEM is an indisputable mover and shaker of future Sudan. As such, it is simply wrong to portray JEM as simply an appendage or a tributary to the Popular Congress Party. In fact, Hoile would be more logical if he is to reverse his assumption and take the Popular Congress Party as an affiliate of JEM. That, however, has not been suggested by anyone to date.

Financing the "Rebels"

Hoile accuses various foreign powers of instigating Darfur problem or elsewhere contributing to its escalation through provision of finance to the Movements. These powers range from militant Islamic groups (see below) to the governments of Eritrea and the United states. Thus Hoile writes,

It is additionally clear that the Darfur insurgents have had considerable external assistance. The Sudan Liberation Army, for example, is said to be receiving arms and support from Eritrea ... The insurgents have also been receiving military supplies by air.... CIA has reportedly supplied arms and money to Darfur's rebels... Washington is using Darfur's rebels, as it did in southern Sudan's thirty-year old insurgency, to destabilise the Khartoum regime. [Hoile 2005:24-25]

And later,

There is no doubt that USAID has been at the heart of the "talking up" of possible deaths from the ongoing conflict and has played a central role in the declaration of "genocide" in Darfur by the United States. [Ibid:26]

Further,

... the United States is actually helping to fund some of the activities of the very gunmen involved in killing policemen – gunmen who if not themselves Islamist extremists are nevertheless closely allied with the Justice and Equality Movement. [Ibid:31]

It is well known that Eritrea does not possess airlift capabilities to deliver weapons to Darfur Movements. That then leaves the fingers pointing at the United States and its government, but only if we assume that Khartoum

government and Mr. Hoile have abandoned their early assertion of Israeli involvement in Darfur's war. Leaving Eritrea aside, it beggars belief even to contemplate that the US government has acted to boost the war in Darfur, for election purposes or otherwise, as Hoile contemplates (Hoile 2005:94). Far from it, and as records after records show, the US government has been at the far front of any other government when it comes to ending Darfur's war. Indeed, many of our Darfur "rebel" colleagues and the international observers who have witnessed the Americans in action at the Darfur Peace Talks in Abuja will share our opinion in this regard. In fact, they describe the American Talks' officials as "bullies." so to speak, but for peace rather than for the continuation of war as Hoile suggests.

In a further attempt to defend his paymasters, David Hoile attempts to develop a connection between al-Qaeda and JEM in particular. This is where Hoile's analysis disintegrates into intellectual hooliganism. In a cheap and opportunistic exploitation of the atrocious September 11 disaster, Hoile states,

The Justice and Equality Movement is said to be receiving assistance from Islamic groups and al-Qaeda... Many of the members of the military wing of the Popular Congress now involved with JEM trained with al-Qaeda members in the 1990s. Minter states that al-Qaeda instructors, including specialists in guerrilla and urban warfare and logistics, have been involved in training Justice and Equality insurgents in Darfur. [Ibid:29]

The presence of al-Qaeda activists in Darfur is alluded to several times in the book. Yet, Hoile refuses to reference his statements or to provide supporting evidence for these assertions. The reader is then left confused whether the author is reporting what is already there or speculating about possible future turns of events:

Dozens of al-Qaeda terrorists were killed in Chad in 2004. Minter states that al-Qaeda involvement in Darfur "dovetails with other reports from North Africa. The desert wastes have become al-Qaeda's latest battleground. There is no doubt that al-Qaeda is already seeking to turn parts of the Sahel – and in this case Darfur – into the next Afghanistan. [Ibid:26]

Few pages earlier, Hoile notes:

In July 2004, for example, a Saudi national said to have been "preaching holy war" within a refugee camp in Chad was arrested. There have been violent scenes at the camp in which two refugees had been shot dead by local security forces. Arms caches had also been seized in the camp. [Ibid: 30]

The involvement of the United States in financing Bin Laden in his early years in Afghanistan was certainly callous and regrettable. Post-September 11 and the after the onset of the War Against Terror present us with a different world altogether. It takes an incredible level of naivety to suggest that both the United States and al-Qaeda are knowingly or unknowingly aiding the same

armed movements. This geopolitical reality seems to have escaped Hoile's notice. In fact, the most basic knowledge about Darfur war suggests the opposite of his assertion. Given the Arab-African twist that is so evident in Darfur war, it makes little sense to assume North African al-Qaeda operatives will back the African oriented "rebels." Rather they are more likely to fight for the Janjaweed with their quasi-Arab banners and the Sudanese government whose hatred of the United States is derived from its Arab-Islamic ideology and its failed Islamic Civilisation Project. Furthermore in support of our claim, the three-man delegation from the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) visiting Darfur from 5-8 June 2004 concluded that,

The OIC is "totally convinced" that the international agencies and Western media have "misrepresented" the Darfur crisis and that Khartoum did its utmost to contain it ... [There have been] no wide scale atrocities by Arabs/Janjaweed against the indigenous Darfurians for whom the rebels are fighting. [Omar 2004]

And later,

The problem is by no means more than a tribal conflict over basic resources, namely water and pasture. [Ibid]

It is obvious that the Islamic organisation considering a humanitarian crisis of such magnitude only as a small tribal conflict is biased towards Khartoum government and hostile to the rebels- JEM included. This is all music to al-Qaeda and David Hoile, but its only status as evidence fatally undermines Hoile's argument.

More much damning evidence from the writers of this same report is easy to find,

The Muslim World has its share of blame for paying a blind eye to the mass slaughter in Darfur. The Arab League (AL) and the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) purport to represent the interests of the Muslim and Arab worlds. But the majority of the AL and OIC member states are flagrant violators of human rights within their own jurisdictions. As a result, they do not command the moral authority to reign in the excesses of Sudan, a member state of both the AL and the OIC. [Omar 2004]

And it goes on:

The Arab League reluctantly sent a low-key mission to investigate the mass killings in Darfur. It reported "gross human rights violations" in a member state but quickly retracted its statement under pressure from Sudan. In the wake of threats of sanctions from the UN, some AL and OIC members have worked behind the scenes to protect the Sudanese government from any impending sanctions or military intervention. [Omar Ibid]

Despite all the dubious sources which Hoile quotes, he has not been able to point to any al-Qaeda operative in Darfur. His main reference is restricted to Chad. Darfur is now among the most heavily monitored spots in Africa by both military observers and the extensive presence of international organisations. At least this is the case since the start of the war. Hoile attempts to drag Al-Qaeda into Darfur war is a tendentious ploy aimed at discrediting the rebels in front of a Western readership. It simply fails to hold water.

All for the sake of Albashir

Hoile's attempt to cast the Darfur crisis as a covert support of Albashir's political ambitions does not come without waging war against almost every other source of information on Darfur. Casualties in Hoile's book are many. For example, Eric Reeves, a formidable and well respected Darfur analyst is unfairly described as lacking in objectivity, discernment and research skills, as well as being a source of disinformation on Darfur (Hoile 2005:105-106.). The western Media in general for Hoile displays inaccurate reporting, sensationalism, prejudice and hypocrisy (Ibid:142). Guilty western media outlets include reputable household names, like the Independent, the Washington Post, the New York Times, the Observer, the Economist, the Financial Times, BBC and many others.

As for international NGOs, they equally fail to please Mr Hoile as they "collude with journalists to hide their own agenda" (Ibid:153). The list unashamedly includes reputable institutions like MSF, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. These groups are accused by Hoile of producing reports that are questionable and flawed (Ibid:159-167).

Obscene Logic

UN Security Council Resolution (1593) dealt a terrible blow to Khartoum government. What is crystal clear is that the Resolution was not instigated by Khartoum government's failure to protect its citizens as such. It was also not triggered by the government's attacks on the rebels. Rather, the Resolution was a culmination of the international outrage against the government attacks on Darfur civilians. While the government of Khartoum can continue denying its obvious links with its surrogate army known as Janjaweed, its aerial bombardment of civilians was evident for all, in and outside the Sudan. After tremendous international pressure, the government of Khartoum pledged to end all military aerial operations in Darfur. The pledge was by all means positive and was welcome by many including Sudan government officials. For some reasons, this is upsetting for Hoile:

That governments reserve the right to use air power in war is obvious. Air power has been used in every recent conflict – not least of which during the Iraq war and subsequent occupation. That civilians are often killed, injured or displaced during even the most clinical bombing attacks against insurgents has also been amply demonstrated in Iraq. The use of power in Darfur has been no different. [Hoile 2005:177]

We must take grave exception to Hoile's last sentence in the above quotation. Despite our disagreement with the Iraq war, we can state categorically that the parallel Hoile is making is not justified. There have been only scattered reports in Iraq indicating that American forces have been deliberately bombarding civilian locations. But this has been a regular feature of Khartoum military air operations, and it is this fact that has precipitated such a powerful international outcry. Indeed, the military air force of Sudan's government consists mostly of Antonov transport planes, which are hopelessly inefficient against armed "rebels." Even against innocent civilians who cannot monitor military radio communications, the performance of these planes has not proved lethal enough for liking of the Khartoum government. That was why government bombardment was often planned to coincide with Friday prayers and market days. Only through attacking a huge congregation of people was the government able to achieve its desire to inflict maximum carnage. One has to be more than simply dogmatic to compare that with the situation in Iraq. If Mr Hoile is still not yet convinced about Khartoum atrocities, here is a communication of some of these planes engaged in "military" operations:

Any village you pass through you must burn. That way, when the villagers come back, they will have a surprise waiting for them. [An Antonov pilot ordering a ground commander of a government army battalion in Darfur, Sudan; US Senator John McCain 2004:1]

And,

An Antonov pilot over Darfur reports to his Khartoum commander: 'there is nothing under me except grass cottages, Sir'. 'I order you to bomb them and expel their religion' (*Tally deenhum*; render them unbelievers) the commander orders back. [Personal Communication from members of Darfur Movements (author's translation)]

Who owns the book?

Checking Hoile's book on the computer websites is startling. Extracts and chapters of the book have already appeared in several sites. While it is legitimate for authors to post their work in websites before their final printing it in the form of a book, Hoile's case looks odd as it seems to flaunt internationally accepted writing traditions. Parts of the book have appeared under institutions that are not expressly linked to the author, for example. While Hoile can claim to have rights to what he writes in ESPAC in which he works as a director, he cannot say the same thing regarding some other websites like the official website of the Sudan Embassy, UK. What is bizarre is that parts of the book are produced in line with other Embassy briefings. As they do not bear Hoile's name, one would have assumed that these articles were written by the Embassy staff.

Hoile's book also appears in a number of websites: Espac (www.espac.org), Embassy of the Republic of Sudan, UK (www.sudanembassy.org), Sudan Vision Independent Daily (www.sudanvisiondaily.com), and perhaps other websites which I could not track down. In addition, Hoile also posts some of

his work in general websites like Sudan.net. To conserve space, let me give two examples.

Hoile has at least 12 postings in the website under Sudan Vision Independent Daily. These postings have been turned into chapters in his book. The use of the term "Independent" affixed to the title of the site is rather enigmatic as the homepage in question comes complete with Sudan's flag. An article under title the "Darfur: Darfur in perspective (Part 4) was posted June 14th 2004. The name of the author has been withheld. Looking over the title of the article, which is also used for Hoile's book, it appears that extracts appear in Hoile's book (compare pages 21-28 and Sudanvision 2004). Yet another article was posted in the Sudan Embassy website, July 13th 2004 under the title: "The Darfur crisis: Looking beyond the propaganda" with no author attached to it. Extracts of this article appear in pages 11 to 24, 33, 165-166 of Hoile's book as well, with no reference to the website (see Sudan Embassy 2004).

Conclusion

There is nothing wrong for David Hoile, or for that matter for any author, to hold views contrary to those of other writers. It is equally acceptable for him to work for the Sudanese government as a consultant or in any other capacity. The fact that the Khartoum government is on its way to the UN Security Council on war crimes charges should not make a difference either. What is deplorable is that Hoile disguises his true affiliation and masquerades as an "independent" human rights activist and expects the world to take him as such. That is what we find utterly despicable.

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