

SUDAN: WHO'S TROUBLED

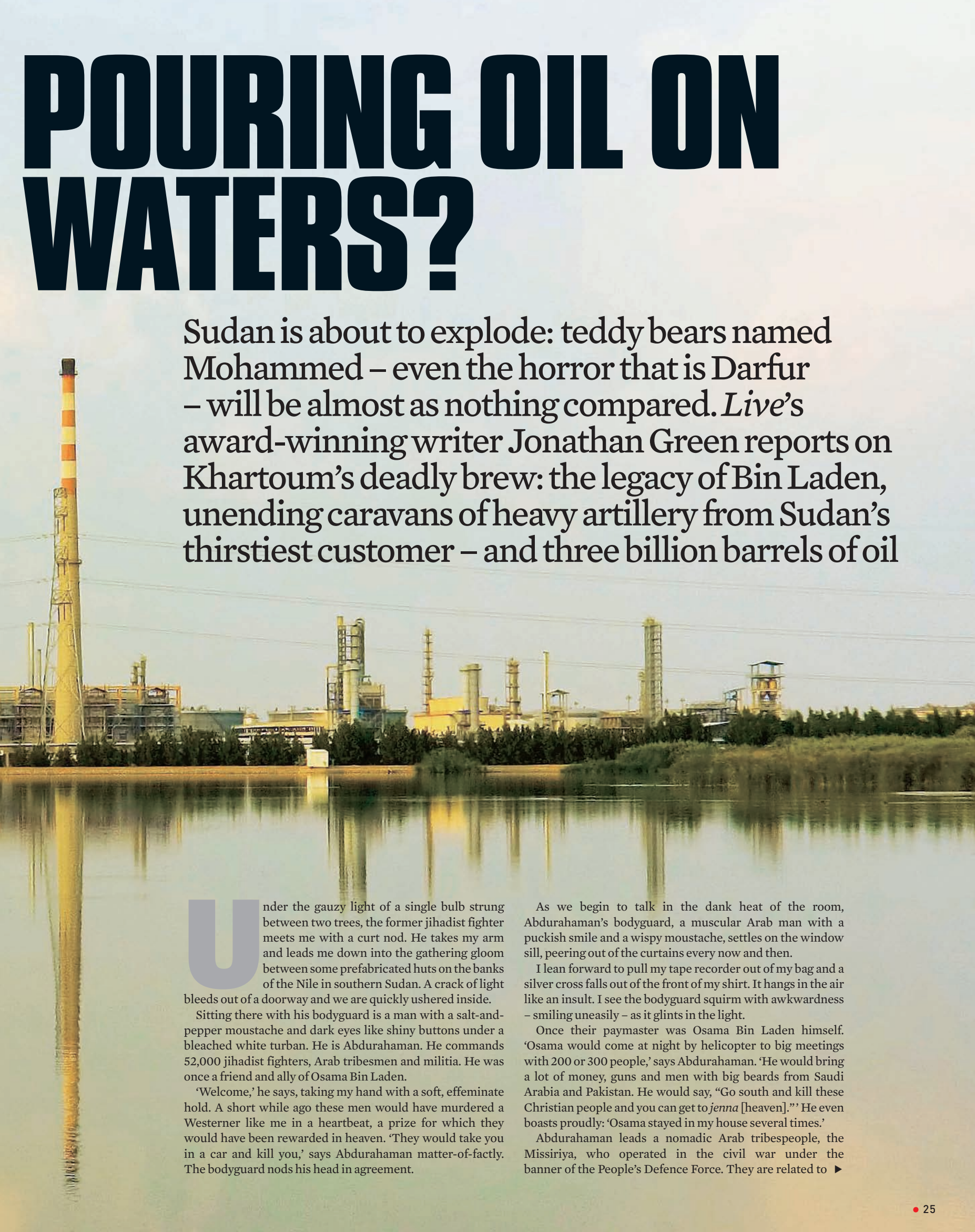


A Sudanese militiaman ready for combat.
Main photo: the Sudan
Khartoum oil refinery



POURING OIL ON WATERS?

Sudan is about to explode: teddy bears named Mohammed – even the horror that is Darfur – will be almost as nothing compared. *Live's* award-winning writer Jonathan Green reports on Khartoum's deadly brew: the legacy of Bin Laden, unending caravans of heavy artillery from Sudan's thirstiest customer – and three billion barrels of oil



Under the gauzy light of a single bulb strung between two trees, the former jihadist fighter meets me with a curt nod. He takes my arm and leads me down into the gathering gloom between some prefabricated huts on the banks of the Nile in southern Sudan. A crack of light bleeds out of a doorway and we are quickly ushered inside.

Sitting there with his bodyguard is a man with a salt-and-pepper moustache and dark eyes like shiny buttons under a bleached white turban. He is Abdurahaman. He commands 52,000 jihadist fighters, Arab tribesmen and militia. He was once a friend and ally of Osama Bin Laden.

'Welcome,' he says, taking my hand with a soft, effeminate hold. A short while ago these men would have murdered a Westerner like me in a heartbeat, a prize for which they would have been rewarded in heaven. 'They would take you in a car and kill you,' says Abdurahaman matter-of-factly. The bodyguard nods his head in agreement.

As we begin to talk in the dank heat of the room, Abdurahaman's bodyguard, a muscular Arab man with a puckish smile and a wispy moustache, settles on the window sill, peering out of the curtains every now and then.

I lean forward to pull my tape recorder out of my bag and a silver cross falls out of the front of my shirt. It hangs in the air like an insult. I see the bodyguard squirm with awkwardness – smiling uneasily – as it glints in the light.

Once their paymaster was Osama Bin Laden himself. 'Osama would come at night by helicopter to big meetings with 200 or 300 people,' says Abdurahaman. 'He would bring a lot of money, guns and men with big beards from Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. He would say, "Go south and kill these Christian people and you can get to *jenna* [heaven]."' He even boasts proudly: 'Osama stayed in my house several times.'

Abdurahaman leads a nomadic Arab tribespeople, the Missiriya, who operated in the civil war under the banner of the People's Defence Force. They are related to ►

► the notorious Janjaweed, the roving killers who have carried out genocide and human rights atrocities in Darfur, western Sudan.

Abdurahaman himself ordered hordes to roar across the cinnamon-coloured savannah of southern Sudan. They would torch the straw-thatched mud houses, shooting infidels and Christians, among them women and children.

Their reward from Bin Laden was Toyota Land Cruisers, machine guns and steel crates full of money. For payment in the next life, they would get the key to heaven. At other times, with their eyes on more profit, they would enslave those they found. Afterwards, they would cut off the ears of the men as trophies to show their paymasters that they had taken Christian lives.

But the politics of mass murder are a fickle business in Sudan. After becoming disaffected with his Muslim ‘brothers’ in the north, Abdurahaman switched allegiance to the Christian south (he accuses his former comrades of not practising their faith, while he remains a ‘good Muslim’).

Osama Bin Laden has, of course, long moved on, even if his influence remains. The vacuum he left was not empty for long. Now Chinese oil companies are the new paymasters of the Arab militias, providing them with weapons for oil.

It is no secret that China and Sudan have had an economic relationship for years. What is changing fast, though, is the depth of that relationship. In its thirst for fossil fuel, the rampant Chinese economy is proving ever more rapacious. So now more than ever it is oil that talks, and oil that drives conflict. Today, Chinese oil companies are extracting £1 billion worth of oil from Sudan every year. Unlike other world powers, the Chinese have no moral embarrassment about doing public business with the fanatical government in Khartoum; they have not, for example, experienced the diplomatic awkwardness of having a primary-school teacher jailed for allowing a teddy bear to be named Mohammed.

It is this relationship that is also driving on the Arab militias who since 2003 have killed some 200,000 people and driven non-Arabs off their land in Darfur, and who are now seizing oil-rich land in the border areas between the north and the south.

Why should we care? Because, as the Chinese drill frantically for oil in these borderlands, more money is given and more arms are traded. Many of the weapons end up in the arms of Islamic fundamentalists. The handwringing over the humanitarian crisis in Darfur continues, but a horrific new war between the Islamic north and its Arab militias and the largely Christian south now seems inevitable. The civil war only ended in a shaky peace two years ago after 21 years of fighting. Two million people died. If it breaks out again, it will make the appalling conflict in Darfur appear almost trivial by comparison.



Sudan is now awash with Chinese weapons

By day the Chinese drill for oil, but at night they train the army. The Chinese say, “Give us oil and we’ll give you guns.” But if they don’t like you, they kill you

‘Militia get salary from Chinese company,’ says Abdurahaman. ‘The Chinese say if you give me oil I give you gun, I give you plane, I give you car. I make school for the army. The Chinese pay the militia directly. If you as a militia want to go out of Sudan they give you money to go. They pay you. If you have father who is sick they take you by plane. The Chinese help the militia. They help them with roads, with cars. If they don’t have fuel, they give them fuel. If they need helicopter they give them that.’

Can we believe him? During my three weeks in the country, I was granted access to the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) military bases in the south. There I saw captured Chinese weapons, the distinctive writing clear on machinery.

‘By day the Chinese work on drilling the oil, but at

night they train the army,’ claims Abdurahaman, gathering his robes around him. ‘Every time you see one Chinese oil worker there is a militia member with him. The militia are the same as Janjaweed. The Chinese say if you give me oil I give you guns, car, helicopter. And if they don’t like you they just kill you.’

It’s estimated that Sudan’s oil reserves are about three billion barrels. The oilfields in the border areas look like nothing so much as Armageddon. Massive barbed-wire compounds encircle Chinese drilling rigs with roaring fires on top, which extract millions of dollars-worth of oil a day. Oil mixed with water is discarded and flows into local streams and rivers, killing everything it touches. As a result, local women miscarry or are made infertile. Children and cattle who drink from the boreholes die. Apart from anything else it’s an environmental disaster.

Chinese engineers blast the area with dynamite hoping to expose underground oil reservoirs while making the ground quake. Many of the local communities that are unlucky enough to be on oil-bearing ground are deracinated and have had members shot and raped.

Unsurprisingly, secrecy surrounds operations within the oil drilling areas, and they are extremely dangerous places for the uninvited. ‘You go there as a white man with cameras and they will shoot your head from your shoulders,’ one senior SPLA general from the south advised me.

The Khartoum government, he said, has poured soldiers, militia and warlords into the areas to keep everyone out. Abdurahaman agrees, claiming that the oil workers are really soldiers and militia dressed as engineers.

The oilfields around the border are contested as the north keeps pushing southwards. Just 50 miles either way could mean billions of dollars lost or won in oil revenue, and at the moment the south contains the majority of the oil fields. In the past, Western petroleum companies tried to take the oil for themselves, but the US Government no longer does business with the Khartoum regime and they pulled out. Chinese oil companies have no such qualms about human rights and are drilling faster and faster.

Tribal chief Stephen Mabil, a tall, softly spoken man, had to lead his people and their families from the land they had lived on for thousands of years when the Chinese-backed militia wanted to clear the area for drilling. ‘The militia come any time of the day and just kill whenever they want,’ he says. ‘They come with Land Cruisers fitted with machine guns. Last year, there was a wedding and government soldiers just came and started shooting. A pregnant 19-year-old was shot dead.’

Mabil now lives in Leal because his former town of Nhialdiu was wiped off the map in February 2002. ►

► Mortar shells landed at dawn, closely followed by a wave of helicopter gunships that razed all the mud huts with machine-gun fire. Then planes dropped heavy bombs, after which 7,000 government troops and militia swept through killing everyone in sight.

And China? It has accounted for a 40 per cent growth in global demand for oil in the past four years alone. Between January and June this year, there was £1.2-billion worth of trade between China and Sudan, a 124 per cent increase from 2006. The weapons that have travelled to Africa in payment – including helicopter gunships, tanks, high-altitude bombers and long-range artillery – have already killed thousands, if not millions. After analysing shell casings collected at Darfur, a UN report concluded that most of the ammunition used in the conflict has been manufactured either in Sudan or China.

A quiet-spoken man with a moustache, Commander Jarehbi Abdul Karim is leader of one of the Darfur rebel factions fighting government-backed Arab militias who massacred his family and the families of his men. We meet privately at a hotel. ‘The Chinese are exploiting the oil in Sudan,’ he says. ‘All the weapons we fight against are Chinese. We fight helicopter gunships that are impossible to fight. We were bombed from altitude. These weapons wipe away entire families in split seconds. We are all very, very angry with the Chinese. They have to stop supplying the Khartoum regime. They need to apologise for what they are doing.’

It’s a futile hope. A recent report by Amnesty International has drawn attention to Chinese arms sales to Sudan and said that ‘arms continue to fuel serious human rights violations in Darfur’.

In Juba, southern Sudan, the word on the street is that war could break out again any day. The tension and escalation of violence are obvious. I realised this when an open-bed truck mounted with a large .50 calibre machine gun and bristling with SPLA soldiers in olive-green camouflage cradling AK47s roared into the courtyard of my hotel.

That night the streets were deserted as news filtered back that the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement had left the power-sharing peace talks. One key reason is that the Khartoum government is not declaring oil revenues. Chinese oil companies, in alliance with Khartoum, are hurriedly pumping oil out of the country before war erupts again. At the same time the north is refusing to pay the south the 50 per cent due to them under the terms of the 2005 peace agreement. Instead, they use the money to buy weapons from China to prepare for hostilities.

Juba couldn’t be more different than Khartoum. In the north, oil money has provided five-lane highways and skyscrapers. In the depressed south, starved of money that is rightfully theirs, the approach to Juba, heavily bombed during the war, is just dirt tracks and rubbish-strewn ditches.

The country is awash with oil, but here in the south there is no readily available petrol. We ran out and waited for days before finding ragamuffin children who topped up our car using lemonade bottles filled with a nasty-looking fuel. Meanwhile, UN and NGO SUVs roam around in the dust. NGO workers party with each other behind walled compounds, while skinny soldiers in olive-green fatigues stand guard outside decrepit mansions. On one muddy roundabout there is a sign, ‘Armed Conflict is Health Risk’.



Above: Sudan’s rich oilfields straddle the border between north and south. Left: President Omar al-Bashir opens a new £500 million pipeline that will carry oil out of the country, bringing in more cash and arms

Juba, in the south, is like a Wild West town. A fight in a nightclub last week ended up in a gun battle. One man was shot in the groin. He later died

Despite the dirt and hardship, inhabitants are relieved that life under the Islamic government, which consisted of random kidnappings, disappearances, torture and murder, is at an end. Instead, Juba feels like a frontier town in the Wild West.

The Beijing Juba Hotel has just been completed and is popular with Ugandan and Kenyan businessmen. But as with so much development here it feels far from permanent. It’s basically a tin box; the bedroom mattresses are filled with cardboard, there are no fire exits or sprinkler system, the floors bend as you walk on

them and the metal in the structure’s design is cheap. All the profits from the hotel are sent straight back to China. Clearly, the Chinese don’t want to invest in building a proper hotel as they fear war could break out again and they could lose all their money.

In this unstable climate, violence is never far away. Militia fighters work in the market attempting to look like regular stallholders, but they don’t fool anyone. And local warlords with gangs of hired thugs drive around in smoked-glass SUVs while their fighters, itching to get back to war, cause havoc.

Nightclubs cater to the returning diaspora – hip young kids who left the country for the US or Europe during the civil war but have started to return since the peace deals. With Nas’s *If I Ruled The World* blaring over the sound system, it appears to me like any other nightclub in London or New York. Whisky flows freely and tempers flare quickly. Last night, a vicious fight broke out when a shaven-headed British contractor punched a local in the face for allegedly touching his wife. An angry mob quickly formed – out for summary justice – as the Brit desperately tried to fend them all off. He was bundled out of the club, but then the shooting started. Bullets whizzed over our heads as we ran for cover. I later learned that one man had been hit in the groin and bled to death.

It’s not easy to keep order here. I meet General Gier Chuang Aluong, minister of telecommunications, in his crumbling mansion. An intensely bright man, who used to be a formidable military commander, he is unflappable dealing with one crisis to the next. During the war he was able to crack Arab codes and lured ►

► Chinese helicopter gunships into landing in the bush where they were overwhelmed by his men.

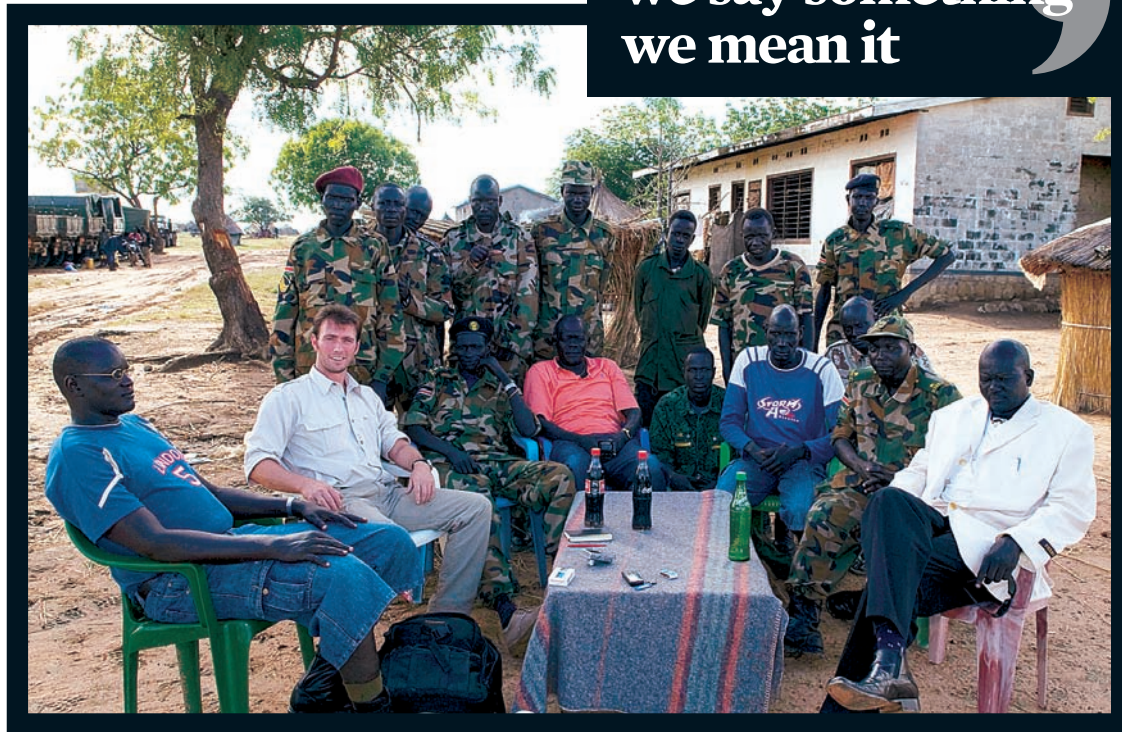
'The north is increasing the army in the oil areas, paying warlords to kill their own people,' he says. 'And the money they get from oil they are spending on military equipment and training from the Chinese.'

It took a week and the highest clearance possible from the SPLA to see captured Chinese weapons. We received a military escort and drove out of Juba with a colonel in a white suit jacket, black trousers and wrap-around shades. The actual site and name of bases is sensitive military information.

As we drive along the muddy roads, women with babies slung on their backs and pots of water on their heads stream past our car on either side. Over a bombed bridge we drove pass a sign that warns in English and Arabic 'Danger: Mines'.

We abruptly veer left and are surrounded by lanky

All the northern armies get help from Islamic countries. But we get nothing from Christian countries. Why is this? We are like you. When we say something we mean it



Live's Jonathan Green meets a group of leaders from the Sudan People's Liberation Army in the south

soldiers pulling the tarpaulin covers off artillery, tanks and rocket-launchers. Mud huts sit next to anti-aircraft guns while families with toddlers camp out around the tanks and women breastfeed children.

After a while the soldiers relax. It doesn't take long to find the stashes of Chinese weapons and boxes of ammunition on the base, along with Russian hardware. We find Chinese writing on an M-46 130mm towed gun. This devastating weapon, capable of firing a shell loaded with chemicals 28 miles, takes pride of

place, having been captured in battle. Most of the soldiers here know they will have to fight the Khartoum government again – it's just a matter of when. 'We will fight to the last man,' says Captain Silver Matthew. 'They fight for money but we fight for freedom.'

The southern Sudanese under attack by the north's genocidal regime cannot understand why the West won't help them. John Kur Chol, an SPLA brigadier, says: 'All the northern armies get help from Islamic countries. But we get nothing from the Christian countries. Why is this? We are like you. When we say something we mean it. And all the time the Chinese – who have no religion – make money from both sides.'

International pressure on China about the genocide in Darfur, which they are facilitating, is having no effect. As a member of the United Nations they have weakened Resolution 1769 on Darfur, voting against 'seizing and destroying weapons' – which would mean destroying weapons they themselves have supplied – in favour of 'monitoring' weapons.

'China does a very careful job of not getting caught,' says Mohammed Abdel Dayem of the Save Darfur Coalition. To try to alleviate criticism of their Sudanese policies they made a very public showing of sending £5 million in aid to Darfur. That's a drop in the ocean compared to the billions they are taking out in oil profits,' he says. 'It's also £2 million less than the £7 million they gave to President Omar al-Bashir to build a new presidential palace in the north.'

The future looks grave and a return to war more likely than ever. Sudan may become a tinderbox conflict like Vietnam or Korea, where the superpowers find a country in which they can fight against one another without declaring all-out war on each other.

Already Blackwater operatives, freelance US military contractors, are training SPLA soldiers in the south.

But Abdurahaman, once on the side of the Khartoum government, now standing against his former paymasters, has incurred their wrath. 'They want to kill me now, and the others here with me,' he says, indicating the other two leaders who are in the room with us. 'Osama is very angry with us. They offer us money, guns and cars to come back but we say no.'

He pauses, then spits with rage, his eyes ablaze. 'In every house in my area there are six, seven people dead from every family. For what? For nothing. The land is destroyed by oil, our cattle starve, there is no water and all the promises the Chinese made have not been kept. They promised roads, schools and hospitals if we helped. But nothing. The Khartoum government and the Chinese are snakes! They are liars! People die for nothing. For what? This is why I change.'

Now his appeal is to the West, to implore them to understand that this is not another African bush war of no consequence. 'The government in Khartoum want Osama to come back to Sudan,' he warns. 'If he does there will be money for them here from other Islamic countries. These people are working with Iran and Syria and the Chinese are helping them. It is very, very dangerous. They are very dangerous to the US, to London, Paris and New York.'

'If American people give Bashir a chance he will make something bad, not just for Sudan but for all of Africa. For American, for Christian people – if you don't tackle the situation quickly there is going to be a big, big problem.' He pauses for reflection and looks at me squarely in the eye.

'It is coming.' ■

SUDAN'S LONG HISTORY OF BITTER AND BLOODY CONFLICT

■ Sudan is Africa's largest country and at 967,500 square miles roughly the size of the entire European Union.
■ In the past 51 years it has only experienced 11 years of peace.
■ Revolutionary Islamic President Omar al-Bashir, 63, heads the Muslim Government in Khartoum in the north. He seized power in a military coup in 1989 and imposed Sharia law.

Sudan is deemed a state sponsor of terrorism by the US Government, not least because Osama Bin Laden was welcomed and set up Al Qaeda outside the capital Khartoum.
■ The Christian and Animist Africans in the south were cattle farmers. They rose against the north as the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). Among their ranks were ten-year-old

boys. They faced armed forces from the north in helicopter gunships and Antonov bombers, who carried out a scorched-earth policy, bombing the south, poisoning rivers and water sources. The Khartoum Government was supplied by Islamic sympathisers from Pakistan, Iran, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan who saw it as a holy war against Christians.

■ The war displaced four million from their homes and cost two million lives; more people have died than in Kosovo, Bosnia, Rwanda and Somalia together.
■ The 21-year civil war ended in 2005 and the country split in two.
■ Britain has given £326 million in aid to Sudan, with a further £114 million still scheduled.
■ Much of the money has gone on peacekeeping, especially in

Darfur, where fighting broke out in 2003. Pro-government Arab militia are accused of ethnic cleansing, killing 200,000 non-Arabs and evicting a further two million from their homes.
■ Violence still erupts in Darfur. But now the Khartoum government is getting billions from China for oil and is re-arming before going back to war against the south.