A human catastrophe waged over oil and power.

In Sudan, starvation as strategy

By Thomas Kirkpatrick

The World Food Program estimates that 1.2 million people in rebel-held areas in southern Sudan face imminent starvation. An additional 1.4 million in government-controlled areas in both northern and southern Sudan require urgent assistance.

It's one of the greatest human catastrophes of the decade — and it's all about oil and power.

Catherine Bertine, the food program's executive director, recently called on the international community to help end the fighting. Doctors Without Borders, the international humanitarian group, added a compelling note couched in agency-speak: "Peace is the necessary precondition for a sustainable solution to the current level of human suffering in southern Sudan."

But to have peace, you need reason. And rational thought fled the Horn of Africa years ago, when President Ja'far Nimayri of Sudan issued a 1983 decree replacing the country's secular laws with the Islamic shariah. Of course, he failed to consult his animist and Christian constituents living in the south, and civil war broke out. The insurgents, operating as the Sudan People's Liberation Army, targeted the Chevron oil fields in southwestern Sudan, driving Chevron away.

A 1989 coup installed President Umar al-Bashir. The ensuing nine years of his rule featured merciless prosecution of the war. By 1996, matters became precarious enough to cause the U.S. Embassy to decamp from Khartoum to temporary offices in Nairobi, Kenya.

Why are people starving? What is this endless civil war about? Mostly this: The government of Sudan wants to regain control of the country's oil reserves. Its strategy has been to pit northern Arab tribespeople against the Dinka tribe in the south. Two things have helped the government immensely. One is SPLA infighting. The other is the horrible specter of mass starvation caused by the breakdown of production and trading systems in the south.



ELEANOR MILL

The government has used starvation to intimidate, to move peoples, to feed armies and to push forward its interests. And so far, nothing has stopped it.

Operation Lifeline Sudan, an amalgam of United Nations and nongovernmental relief organizations, stepped into the breach and attempted to forestall the spread of famine. Several smaller organizations not associated with the operation joined in. How did the government respond? It denied these humanitarian groups access to particular groups of civilians affected by the war. Government planes dropped bombs near emergency feeding centers. They even bombed groups of civilians seeking humanitarian relief.

Earlier this summer, unidentified gunmen killed three workers from the U.N.'s World Food Program. Recent fighting between government factions has shut off access to hard-hit areas in need of relief services. The combatants loot aid storehouses at will and present an indiscriminate threat to humanitarian health and medical teams.

In the meantime, the Sudanese government boasts a new constitution supposedly ratified in a recent referendum by 97 percent of the voters. Shariah remains the law of the land, but at least the new constitution provides a few useful working definitions. It identifies Unity State as part of southern Sudan. The importance of this region lies with the oil reserves contained therein, and the key word in the definition is *southern*. The new constitution gives the south the chance to chose between secession or remaining a part of Sudan in a referendum four years hence.

Khartoum's apparent courtesy toward the south seems at cross-purposes with an agreement signed in January 1997 with the National Oil Company of China for the extraction of oil. Refinery construction now under way in Khartoum indicates the government is serious about becoming an oil producer. In fact, President Umar al-Bashir recently predicted Sudan would soon become self-sufficient in petroleum and would start exporting oil early next year. In other words, Unity State won't go anywhere anytime soon, but the Dinka inhabiting the area might.

The nightmare scenario: The government could depopulate the oil-rich region by driving the Dinka into the region south of the River Lol, then repopulate Unity State with Arab tribes. Or it may take advantage of the current state of war and rely on another means of depopulation — famine. Victims of starvation don't vote.

An on-again, off-again cease-fire went into effect July 15. But the battle for the town of Torit, located close to the border with Uganda, erupted last week, with the rebels apparently gaining the upper hand. Relief organizations had hoped for enough time to regroup and reestablish supply corridors. Now that hope seems unlikely.

Whatever time donor nations can buy won't be enough to stem the tide of famine. That is because this war has little to do with humanity and everything to do with economics and political power. More than a million people may starve in this life-and-death contest for oil.

Thomas Kirkpatrick (thomasik@worldnet.att.net) writes about Africa and South America for the Commentary Page.

August carries the scent of presidential resignation

By Patrick J. Buchanan

In August of the sixth year of his presidency, Richard Nixon resigned.

In August of the sixth year of his presidency, Bill Clinton must contemplate the same end.

For if what Monica Lewinsky is allegedly telling Kenneth Starr is true — that she and the President had a sexual relationship and agreed to lie about it under oath — how does Clinton survive?

Is perjury consistent with remaining chief law enforcement officer of the United States?

Clinton's defenders have a new position: Lying about sex in a civil trial is inconsequential and never prosecuted. But if that is true, why did Lewinsky need immunity? And from what was her mother, Marcia Lewis, given immunity? If a 25-year-old ex-intern is at risk of prosecution for lying about sex in a civil suit, does not the same law and risk apply to the 51-year-old President-lawyer who did the same thing?

Reporters say Clinton plans to tell Starr the identical story he told in his deposition in the Paula Jones suit: He never had sex with "that woman." His lawyers had best sit Clinton down and explain: If he lies this time, he risks far more than his presidency; he risks a post-presidential trip to a federal prison farm.

Speaking of the President's lawyers, everyone in the White House counsel's office who spoke with him about how to handle Monicagate can now expect subpoenas to address the grand jury. For if Bruce Lindsey, a Clinton confidant and White House counsel, does not have lawyer-client privilege in his conversations with the President, they surely do not. And a U.S. appellate court has said Lindsey must talk.

A few of the President's men yet insist that he is telling the truth. But if Clinton did not have a sexual relationship with Lewinsky, he is the victim of a conspiracy more vast and vicious than any this city has ever seen. Why is he not screaming his innocence to the heavens?

Consider what we must believe to believe Clinton has told the truth. We must believe that Lewinsky, given total immunity from any prosecution, now plans to put herself in direct jeopardy of prison by going into a grand jury and telling a stinking pack of lies about an innocent President. Included in that rotten pack of lies, she will confess to lewd and lascivious conduct in which she never engaged.

Why would a woman do this?

Clinton's story no longer passes the laugh test.

This brings us to the course of action recommended by many of his supporters: Bring in Starr on Aug. 17; admit to a sexual relationship with Lewinsky; go on national TV to explain why he lied; and apologize. Americans will forgive him, and we can all move on.

The problem with Operation Candor is that if the President admits he committed perjury in his deposition for the Paula Jones case, Starr's next question will be: "Did your lawyers know that you committed perjury, or did you lie to them, too?" If Clinton says the lawyers did not know, one may contradict him. If he says they did, Bob Bennett and others will be in the soup beside him.

Also, if Clinton admits he lied in his deposition, he puts himself at risk of a new suit by Paula Jones charging him with a criminal tort in destroying her constitutional right to a fair trial by having committed perjury. Not only will her harassment suit be back on the docket, but also she will have a new charge against the President.

Indeed, if Clinton admits to lying about Lewinsky under oath, there will be a natural presumption on the part of the jurors in the Jones suit that he also lied about Paula Jones. That could cost the Clintons a cool million dollars.

Should the President admit to having lied to the country, he would also be admitting having exploited and made fools of his lawyers, aides and supporters, who have all been vouching for his truthfulness for six months.

How do you lead people after you've done that to them?

Unsolicited advice to President Clinton: If the truth *may* kill your presidency, any perjury will surely do so — and it will be the beginning of criminal proceedings against you. Better to defy any subpoenas, should any come, and even defy a Supreme Court order to testify. At least then, you will be defending the presidency — not just yourself.

Patrick J. Buchanan's column is distributed by Creators Syndicate Inc.

Not-so-Silent 'Cal' Coolidge spoke volumes about his time and ours

By Alvin S. Felzenberg

They all put him down, the chattering class of his day. Will Rogers impersonated Calvin Coolidge over the radio. Alice Roosevelt Longworth said he looked "as though he was weaned on a sour pickle." H.L. Mencken said he had a knack for appealing to "boobs." When Coolidge asked Rogers to tell him the latest jokes, he replied, "I can't. You appointed them all."

When told Coolidge had died, Dorothy Parker asked, "How can they tell?"

With today being the 70th anniversary of Coolidge's ascension to the presidency, the President known to history as "Silent Cal" is having the last laugh. He is the subject of three new books, a conference at the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston, and a weekend of festivities at his family home in Plymouth Notch, Vt., where his father, a notary public, swore him into the office of president over a kerosene lamp.

Why the revival of interest in Coolidge? Two reasons: the similarity of his times to ours and the quality of his character.

Like the 1990s, the 1920s were times of unprecedented economic growth. If President Clinton owes his high approval ratings to the strength of the present economy, the prosperity Coolidge oversaw certainly influenced how Americans felt about Silent Cal.

Historians of the future will debate whether Clinton was the initiator or beneficiary of good times. An increasing number say the Coolidge prosperity resulted from a deliberate policy. Silent Cal cut taxes four times. No wonder Ronald Reagan hung Coolidge's portrait in the cabinet room.

But Coolidge was no supply-sider. He paid for his tax cuts with deep cuts in government spending. Having no war, hot or cold, to worry about, Coolidge could cut defense and deficits simultaneously. No free-trader, he also looked to tariffs to help balance budgets.

He and his advisers were sensitive to what is now called "the fairness issue." Seventy percent of his tax cuts went to middle-class Americans (those earning $10,000 a year or more). People who made less than $3,000 paid no taxes at all.



Morality tottered. The economy boomed. Technology surged.

What about the Great Depression? It was once conventional wisdom that easy money, stock speculation, installment buying and greed produced the Great Depression. Economic historians now attribute it to a combination of the Federal Reserve's contraction of the money supply and President Herbert Hoover's approval of the Smoot Hawley tariff and tax increases.

Coolidge's times, like ours, witnessed great transformations in communications and technology. Thomas Edison was the most admired man in the world (a distinction yet to be bestowed on Bill Gates). Mass media and mass advertising grew to maturity.

Radios became commonplace in the American home. With them came commercials — and presidential broadcasts.

Attendance at the movies (an Edison invention) rose from 40 million to 100 million a week when Coolidge was in the White House. Car registrations rose from 9.3 million to 26.3 million. Alan Shepard and other pioneers of the space age were either born or grew up when Coolidge was president and Charles Lindbergh was the nation's hero.

Morally, the country was having a nervous breakdown. Alcoholic beverages were officially prohibited while nicotine was socially encouraged. Narcotics, not yet illegal, were readily available. The word *addict* first became commonplace. Sexual experimentation of every kind was rampant. So were religious revivals. Billy Sunday could pack a house as readily as Al Jolson.

Presiding over all this was a gentle New Englander one biographer called a "Puritan in Babylon." With him was his partner in life, Grace, always to be remembered as the "lady in the red dress with the white collies" in Howard Chandler Christy's painting. This former teacher of the deaf drew national attention to her profession.

In his quiet way, Calvin Coolidge reassured a nation that had been disillusioned by a war that was supposed to have ended all wars and shocked at the corruption of the Harding administration (Teapot Dome, bribery, featherbedding and bimbo eruptions).

At a time when the Ku Klux Klan wielded great political influence, the President thought not to have said very much repeatedly spoke out for tolerance, mutual respect and greater understanding. He condemned lynching in the South, called for a biracial commission to "promote a better policy of mutual understanding," and did what he could to remove one negative legacy of Woodrow Wilson: segregation within the government.

He best made plain his faith in his fellow citizens and his nation in his opening remarks before the Holy Name Society in 1924: "Something in all human beings makes them want to do the right thing. Not that this desire always prevails; oftentimes, it is overcome, and they turn towards evil. But some power is constantly calling them back. Ever there comes a resistance to wrongdoing. When bad conditions begin to accumulate, when the forces of darkness become prevalent, always they are ultimately doomed to fail, as the better angels of human nature are roused to resistance."

It is easy to see why so many Americans chose to "Keep Cool with Coolidge."

Alvin S. Felzenberg writes and lectures on the American presidency. Last week, he delivered a paper on Coolidge and race relations at a conference at the Kennedy Library.

■ **Tomorrow:** David Boldt's "Alarms and diversions"; Acel Moore's "Urban perspective."

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