

MY CONNECTION NO. 14

July 18, 2025

Dear friends,

Recently, a French actor wrote a fiction in which he pictured himself reincarnated as a condor. For the sake of the cause—**SUDAN**—I am borrowing his condor and heading to the country where I served as a missionary for eleven years. Fair warning: if you're expecting a "summer" column—something light (suited to these holidays)—you'll be disappointed, sorely disappointed! There's nothing light or funny in this Connection. But you will be informed about a great tragedy that is flying under the radar of the news—even though it is the biggest humanitarian crisis today. And so, you'll be able to include these poor people in your thoughts and prayers.

Let's not go straight to Khartoum. I want to spare myself... and spare you. By bird's flight, by condor's flight, let's first head to Nairobi to meet my friend, John Ashworth. He and I were on mission in Khartoum in the 80s. Out of the blue, I ask him: "John, you still keep up with what's happening in Khartoum, since you still serve as a resource for the Church there—can you give me an overview of this civil war tearing the country apart these past two years?" John obliged right away: "Let me give you some key bullet points (the English phrase seems apt for a war) that might help you write something for your network.

- Sudan is proud of its history of non-violent popular resistance (intifada). This brought down military dictatorships in 1964, 1985, and 2019, but the military have always come back, as is happening again now. I'M A WITNESS TO THIS. I ARRIVED IN SUDAN IN 1986, JUST AFTER THE OVERTHROW OF SUCH A REGIME, THAT OF NIMEIRY, AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT, OVERTURNED TWO YEARS LATER BY BASHIR, A MILITARY OFFICER, WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD. (the capitals are from the condor—or rather from me)
- At a certain level, it's a conflict between two military factions: the SAF (official army) and the RSF (mercenaries who have established themselves as an alternative). That is a bit too simplistic. In fact, the conflict has also taken on an ethnic dimension.

- It's important to note how entrenched the army is in the country's economy, with both sides risking losing both power and wealth if they lose the conflict. BOTH FACTIONS DRAW FUNDS FROM THE GOLD MINES THEY CONTROL, WHICH FUNDS THEIR WEAPONS.
- Currently, both sides still think they can achieve a military victory so there are no serious peace negotiations.
- The establishment of two rival governments, effectively dividing the country in two, is a very negative development. Both 'governments' are military, even if they claim otherwise.
- · A dangerous side effect is the rise of regional and ethnic militias backing one side or the other.
- This situation is generally considered the largest humanitarian catastrophe in the world, which says a lot given what's happening in Gaza, Ukraine, etc. IN VERY BOLD NUMBERS, HERE ARE SOME STATISTICS:

13,000,000 — the number of displaced persons

17,000,000 — the number of children out of school

150,000 — the number of deaths

- The conflict has alarmingly international dimensions, both regional (Libya, Chad, Kenya, Egypt, Ethiopia, South Sudan, etc.) and broader (UAE, Wagner/Russia, etc.)
- · The Islamists, ousted from power in 2019, are regaining strength and influence.
- Nonviolent resistance continues, notably through 'Emergency Response Rooms' ERR which have emerged spontaneously to provide humanitarian aid but also a certain degree of organization and security for people. This is a completely new model of resistance and aid, informal and decentralized, that the international community has struggled to understand or acknowledge. In any future peace negotiations, the ERR must be given a strong voice, as they truly represent the people."

THANK YOU SO MUCH, JOHN. Without further ado, I mount (or ride—I'm not sure how one rides) my condor. Its condor-GPS takes me to Gedaref, a city on the road between Khartoum and Port Sudan. The surroundings of this city have been more or less spared by war. The parish priest there hasn't been idle. He is a Sudanese priest who succeeded me as Vicar General in Khartoum. If I'd stayed in Sudan, maybe I'd be in Gedaref now. Since the start of the civil war, Father Quintino has been working to receive those fleeing the conflict. By a miracle—and with the help of Western Union—I was able to send him some money to help. Here's his report to me:



“In the cities of Gedaref, New Halfa, Kassala, Atbara, and Dongola, there is no electricity. The RSF keep firing (using drones) at electrical installations in these cities. People suffer from the lack of electricity and water. Just imagine such human wickedness against other humans.

In Khartoum, where I can't go, the SAF continue massacring many South Sudanese suspected of links with the RSF. Imagine that. Let's keep praying for peace in Sudan. The people are truly suffering. Next week I will go to Galabat, the border between Sudan and Ethiopia, to serve my poor displaced people.”

My condor then refuses to visit my good friend, Archbishop Michael Didi, the new Archbishop of Khartoum; he isn't even in the capital, he's had to flee to Port Sudan, he tells me. And Cardinal Zubeir Wako, with whom I worked for six years? Him, he's had to leave for South Sudan. And what about my former places of work—Hilla Mayo, the cathedral (maybe now an RSF weapons depot), or my old residence in Kober? At best, nothing but ruins!

In fact, the condor learned all this via Google:

“The Catholic cathedral in Khartoum has suffered significant damage during the ongoing conflict in Sudan. Photos show parts of the mission buildings strewn with debris, walls heavily scarred by bullets or shelling, and rooms blackened by smoke.

The situation is disastrous: food shortages are reported and families are sheltering at the mission. The area around the cathedral has been badly



affected by the clashes, with the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) trying to seize nearby military bases.”

In these circumstances, out of breath and out of tears, it’s best not to go on. “CONDOR, TAKE ME BACK TO MONTREAL.” In *Le Devoir* of July 14, I find a rare editorial on Sudan. I borrow two paragraphs from it.



Meanwhile, in Sudan...

by Marie-Andrée Chouinard

“Since April 2023, 13 million civilians are believed to have been displaced by the ongoing war, 30% of them in neighboring countries. Some 17 million children are deprived of schooling, and almost all (80%) of the hospitals in conflict zones are no longer functioning. Diseases like cholera, dengue, and malaria threaten the population.

Caught between the war in Ukraine and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Sudan’s civil war is happening without much media coverage in the West. That raises complicated questions about what drives our sense of concern: since the atrocities in Sudan rival those we have witnessed in Israel, Ukraine, or Gaza, how does the international community choose when to denounce war crimes against the vulnerable?”

This condor ride awoke many old memories. When we picked Sudan as our new mission in 1983, Guy Lévesque’s mother was surprised: “Couldn’t you have chosen something better for my Guy?” she said to us. We, on the other hand, thought, “Sudan is at rock bottom—it can only get better!” Well, we were wrong. Since then, misfortunes have never ceased afflicting these dear Sudanese. “Struck down, but never destroyed,” as Saint Paul would say (II Cor 4:9).

To conclude, this time I’ll use the words of my friend Quintino: “Let us continue to pray for peace in Sudan. The people are truly suffering too much!”

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