PEACE: A CHANCE FOR THE SPLA TO GROW

Salva Kiir unexpectedly becomes President of Southern Sudan in July 2005 when Garang dies in a helicopter crash. Garang had believed in a united Democratic Sudan. Kiir wants independence for the South.

By April 2004 it is clear that peace was coming. The SPLA leader, Dr. John Garang, says, "there are no more hills ahead." But the SPLA has just 35,000 soldiers, all volunteers. The Sudanese army and its militias—known as "other armed groups" or OAGS—number far more. So the SPLA sets out on a recruitment drive.

Kiir immediately sees that the biggest threat to independence was the militia—southern Sudanese who would sell their allegiance to the highest bidder. Khartoum’s security chiefs have long used these militia to fight the SPLA, and they could still wreck his hopes.

So Kiir begins negotiating with the biggest militia commander, General Paulino Matiep and in January 2006 they sign a deal. Paulino becomes a top general in the SPLA and his troops are put on the SPLA payroll. And for good measure, all SPLA salaries are doubled.

Over the next five years the SPLA continues to grow by absorbing other militias, discontented youths and rebels. The police, prison service and wildlife service grow in exactly the same way.

By independence the SPLA has 745 generals, that is 11 more than the four U.S. services combined and second only worldwide to Russia. Each general is paid handsomely and also has a personal retinue of bodyguards, vehicles and at least one house.

And on the eve of independence, salaries are doubled ... again.

As the referendum approaches, President Bashir realizes the game is up. He can’t afford to buy off enough southern Sudanese fighters to stop independence. So he flies to Juba five days before voting begins and says he will welcome South Sudan as an independent, peaceful neighbour.

Meanwhile, ordinary South Sudanese had thought that peace meant fewer men and fewer guns, not more of them...