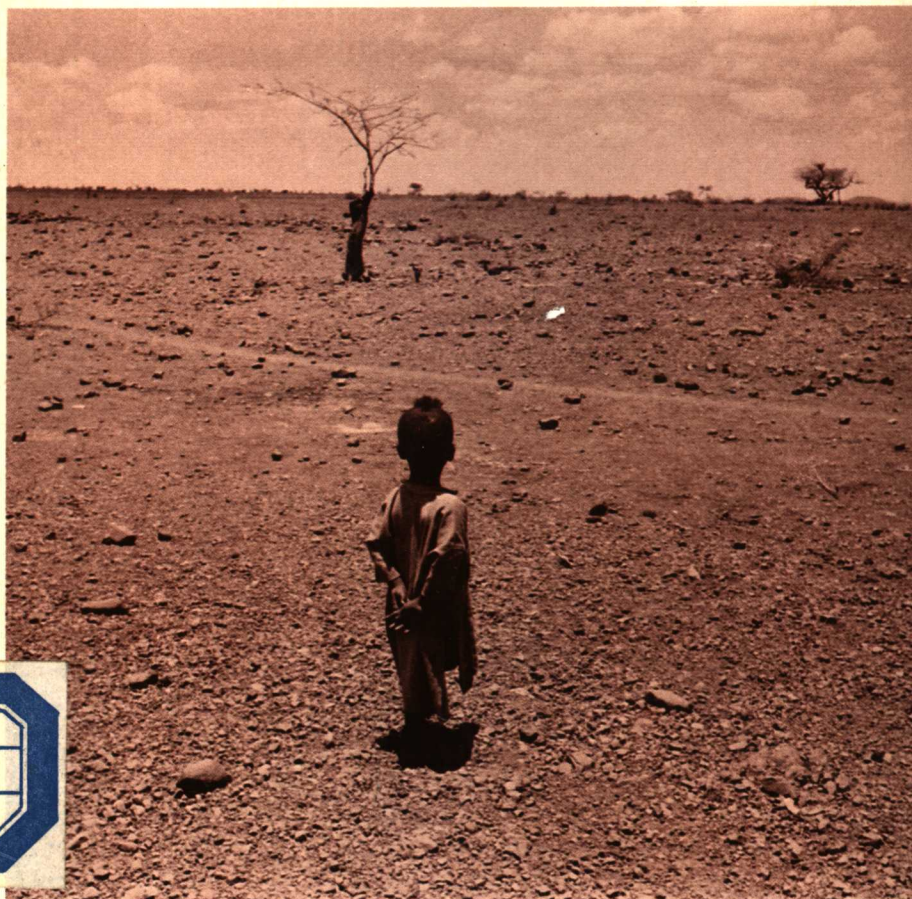


AN AFRICAN WINTER



PRESTON KING

DROUGHT, WAR, FAMINE - IS THERE ANY HOPE FOR AFRICA?

Poverty + drought + war + debt: these are the building blocks of famine. Countries overwhelmed by national and human devastation cannot readily defend themselves against the accelerating encroachment of desert. The African disaster affects not only humans but also the environment as a whole. What is to be done?

Preston King combines firsthand experience of these countries with extensive knowledge of international politics. His powerful and impassioned book offers a unique assessment of the interlocking factors which result in these modern plagues and argues there are solutions if governments, international organizations and individuals can learn from the mistakes of the past.

With an Introduction by Richard Leakey

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Preston King

AN AFRICAN WINTER

*With a Note on Ecology and Famine
by Richard Leakey*



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In memory of my late friend
Okot p'Bitek
who wrote, with knowledge, of pain

And in praise of the work of
OXFAM
who have done so much, so efficiently,
to diminish its hold



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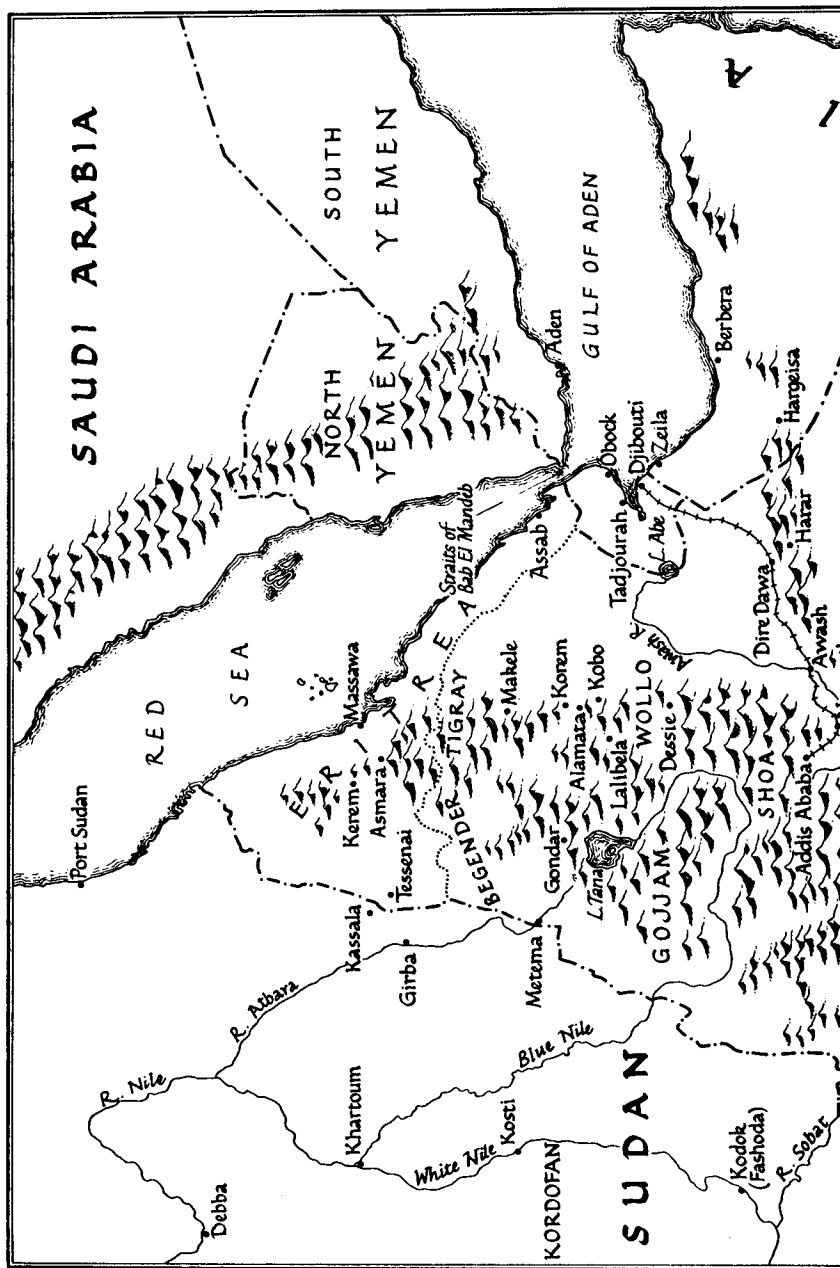
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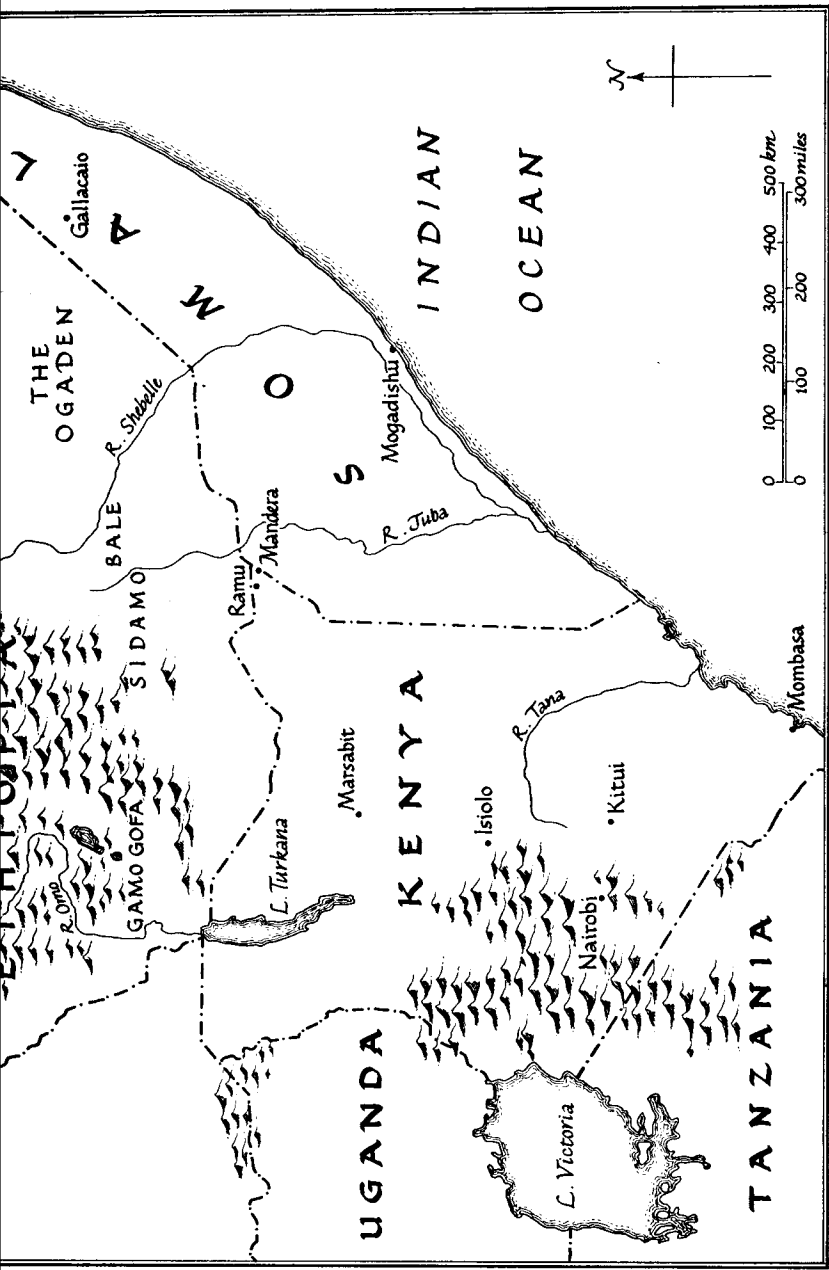
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Preface

For Africa, independence was a boon, met with joy. But it imposed a burden, increasingly sustained with sorrow. Each new, fragile state, based on an uncertain and vulnerable tax base, was insecurity itself. With severely limited resources and prospects, they were all swiftly exposed to regional and international competition. They faced three great difficulties.

The first, though not necessarily the most important, had to do with the structure of economic relations between former colonial centres and colonial peripheries. This unbalanced and indeed exploitative structure persists in the present high levels of African debt to the northern states. The second difficulty had to do with natural conditions, such as friable tropical soils, uncertain rainfall and pest infestation. The third problem related to the quality of home and foreign policy, especially where these inclined towards conflict, as they do increasingly. The crisis in which Africa is currently enmeshed is a combination of these and associated problems.

African states are independent, not autonomous. They form an inescapable part of the global economic and political system. What African leaders do in Africa affects African peoples, but what American leaders do in Washington also affects African peoples. The consequences of decisions taken in the City of London, on Wall Street or in the other financial capitals of the North are immense, and yet not obvious to lay observers. It is important to avoid the trap of Europe-bashing, but it is misleading to lay blame 'fairly and squarely' (which means mostly) at the feet of African elites. It is important to avoid falling overboard in the promotion of no-holds-barred, free-enterprise solutions, but there is no point in hot-ballooning it into the heaven of simplistic and all-encompassing statist solutions. No problem is to be explained exclusively by reference to the victim: we all have our own share of responsibility to bear.

The one, central change in attitude I would wish to see on the African side is a weakening of the tendency to avoid (for whatever reasons) sharp

debate of public policy. The one, central reversal I would wish to see take place on the North Atlantic side is of the tendency ostentatiously to ignore the extent of northern involvement in the continuing African *débâcle*. The level of palpable *official* indifference is appalling. Africa's is a global problem and requires to be met on a global basis, leaving ideological cant and other forms of misplaced self-righteousness to one side.

One of the most important tasks of the great powers in the African continent is to pursue the restoration of peace with justice by every means. They must be dissuaded from deliberately fomenting or acquiescing in local conflicts in order to secure strategic or other advantage. Africa needs less, not more, conflict, and it is only a pulling-back from the fearful misuse of limited resources that will allow constructive responses to critical problems; as we survey the continent, however, what we observe is not more peace, but more war.

To the north, Morocco and Polisario do battle for Western Sahara. Libya imposes herself upon Chad. Burkina Faso and Mali are swept up in an absurd engagement along the whole of their common frontier. Egypt enjoys an uncertain peace, contending with a destabilizing Israeli irredentism to the east and with a threatening Libyan adventurism to the west. In the Sahelian arc that runs from the Atlantic to the Red Sea, not a single state (Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, Sudan, Ethiopia) has been spared a *coup d'état*. Civil war has crippled most of them. And civil war has settled on Uganda – wedged between Sudan and Tanzania, between Zaire and Kenya – the cumulative death toll over the past decade passing the 600,000 mark. To the south, the apartheid Republic stumbles from crisis to crisis, dispatching its troops to the outer limits of its regional empire, to smash into Angola, Botswana, Mozambique and other states. It complains querulously about the lack of democracy abroad, but it is stricken with paralytic fear that democracy may overtake it at home.

The images of dying children remind us of the tie between these deaths and drought. But with every increment of peace, just that much more of vital energy and resources can be allocated to contain drought and associated problems. Famine is usually at its worst in states that are at war.

★

This book was conceived in January 1985 and completed a year later. A few people contrived to make life difficult. Most were fantastic in their

helpfulness. Those friends, associates and colleagues who have helped will know quite well who they are. The vast number of people involved, together with their institutional affiliations, have inspired me to omit, for good and ill, a naming of the names of the virtuous. What is perfectly clear is that, without the help of so many people, such a book could not have been completed – or even indeed begun.

This book is not written as an academic essay. The material and experiences from which it is drawn are so complex that to supply the normal range of citations seemed impracticable. The final chapter (14) is more open-ended and argumentative, and it seemed necessary to attempt to supply references there in a somewhat more systematic way.

Part One DROUGHT

