

## Troubleshooter

**Alumnus Jonathan S. Gration, a decorated Air Force major general, is President Obama's special envoy to Sudan, a nation torn by civil war but a region where Gration's lifelong familiarity with it may pay off in orchestrating, and maintaining, tentative peace.**

A lifelong Republican and a decorated military leader, Jonathan S. Gration ENG'74 fell in line behind Barack Obama after touring Africa with the then U.S. senator from Illinois in the summer of 2006 when it became clear that Obama was presidential timber. The signs were everywhere for Gration to see, from Obama's bold confrontation of Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki over his regime's corruption to his emotional, but resolute, reaction to the refugee camps in Chad teeming with victims of the civil strife in nearby Darfur.

Gration—"Scott" to friends—saw that Obama could become, he says, "a wonderful leader whom I could follow willingly," a person who possessed a keen analytical mind, a measured nonpartisan sense of judgment, and an integrity beyond reproach. Gration promptly retired as an Air Force major general and jumped on board to help Obama run for the presidency while splitting time as CEO of Millennium Villages, a nonprofit organization assisting impoverished African communities, and the Safe Water Network, which provides safe water to vulnerable populations. To help improve the senator's image on national security, Gration toured Iowa preceding the start of the Democratic primaries and emerged as a charter member of his inner circle, serving as a foreign policy adviser on issues as disparate as counterterrorism and nuclear disarmament. Following Obama's momentous victory, Gration informed the president that he would be "happy to serve wherever you think best." In March, Obama named him special envoy to Sudan, the African nation that contains Darfur, where the ravages of genocide, poverty, and tribal conflict have garnered the world's attention.

An Air Force general as African diplomat? Gration is the son of missionaries who moved to the Congo when Gration was just 18 months old, where he grew up speaking Swahili fluently. Throughout his long military career—which included stints as a decorated fighter pilot who flew 274 missions during the First Gulf War, running the air war in 2003 during the second war, and working for the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the United States European Command as director of strategy, plans, and policy



(which included oversight of 47 African nations)—he had visited Kenya and Uganda to help build airstrips and orphanages and train pilots.

Sudan confronts the Obama administration and Gration with daunting challenges, but he is optimistic. Sudan has been rife with civil war for two decades, pitting the government of President Omar al-Bashir against rebel groups who took up arms over the fight for religious freedom and a share of oil proceeds and pastureland. A peace agreement was signed in 2005, although the resumption of sporadic skirmishes threatens to ignite a wider fight that would sabotage elections slated for February—Sudan's first democratic presidential and parliamentary elections in two decades—followed by a proposed referendum taking effect in 2011 that could split the nation in two. Gration is also grappling with the continued flow of humanitarian aid into the country after el-Bashir expelled 13 non-governmental organizations in March following the International Criminal Court's issuance of a warrant for his arrest on charges of masterminding war crimes in Darfur.

"There has been progress in supplying food and reducing the violence since 2005," says Gration. "We have big goals and a big vision there. The future for the next generation of Sudanese is at stake."

— Bill Glavin