

# PROSPECTS FOR PEACE IN SUDAN

## BRIEFING

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### Overview

Sudan is in a curious state of equilibrium. None of the major parties, in government or opposition, is strong enough to move decisively towards peace. Each one is divided in its own way, and most do not appear to be moving towards unifying themselves. None of the regional players nor the peace initiatives have sufficient momentum or leverage to move the parties. In this situation, the parties shuffle and reconfigure their alliances, but dare not make any significant move for fear of internal fracture. Meanwhile, war and political stasis continue. This situation raises the question of whether a peace can be negotiated between willing and active parties, or whether major external leverage will be required to—in effect—*impose* a peace settlement on reluctant belligerents.

### The 4 April Plane Crash

In a plane crash blamed on poor weather, fifteen senior army officers were killed at Adar Yiel in Upper Nile. Among them were Colonel Ibrahim Shams el Din and Maj.-Gen. Yasin Arabi. These were two highly significant figures in the security nexus at the core of the Sudan Government. Among the others killed were a number of high-ranking officers in the army and Popular Defence Forces.

Ibrahim Shams el Din was from Shendi. A long-standing Islamist, he was one of the organisers of the 1989 coup and as Minister of State for Defence was responsible for the military strategy in the oilfields. Col. Ibrahim was close to the putative leader of the coup, Mukhtar Mohamadeen, an air force pilot who was shot down and killed near Nasir shortly before the coup. His junior rank (major at the time of the coup) prevented him from taking senior positions in the government; instead he tended to be in charge of special operations and other important but low-profile tasks. He was instrumental in resisting the 1990 Ramadhan coup attempt, and played a leading role in the subsequent crackdown, as well as many subsequent high level security operations including the 1992 Juba repression and the actions taken in response to the 1994 el Fasher mutiny. Although Ibrahim Shams el Din had a very low public profile in the government—and in fact his posthumous appearances on television were the first that many Sudanese had seen of him—his significance was such that he was seen as being as powerful as the Chief of Staff.

Yasin Arabi originates from Ed Daien. He had been highly placed in military intelligence since the 1980s, rising to be head of the department. He was considered a military man who aligned himself with the Islamists out of opportunism rather than personal conviction. He was reportedly in charge of the summary investigation of the Ramadhan 1990 coup attempt suspects, all of whom were later executed. He was also said to be closely involved in the 1992 repression in Juba and other special operations.

The loss of these two men is a major blow to the hardline faction within the Sudan Government. It is bound to raise questions about whether the crash was truly an accident.

## **The Death of Yousif Kuwa Mekki**

Commander Yousif Kuwa Mekki, former SPLM Governor of the Nuba Mountains, died in the UK on 31 March, from bone cancer. His death robs the Nuba of their most prominent and respected political leader. It is a loss to the SPLA and to the Nuba. Yousif was the embodiment of Dr John Garang's vision of the 'New Sudan': a Moslem from the geographical North who was deeply committed, personally and politically, to tolerance and an identity that combined both national integration with local cultural integrity. Yousif's death is a challenge to the Nuba leadership in Sudan and outside to articulate their vision for the Nuba in the future.

## **More on the Garang-Turabi Accord**

The Memorandum of Understanding between the SPLM and the Popular National Congress continues to send its ripples throughout the Sudanese political scene. There is much confusion and bewilderment among Southern Sudanese, and deeper than ever paralysis within the NDA.

After leaving Geneva, the two-man SPLM delegation (Pagan Amum and Yassir Arman) visited London and Cairo. However, contrary to initial promises, the two negotiators did not brief the NDA in a full meeting. Instead, individual meetings were held with NDA members. It is possible that the reluctance of the SPLM negotiators to meet with the NDA reflected the difficult questioning they received in London from the Sudanese community there. In addition, it appears that even very senior SPLA commanders were not in possession of copies of the Memorandum as much as two weeks after it was agreed.

Turabi remains in detention along with many of his supporters. Members of the PNC abroad are mobilising support. Meanwhile, the Government is threatening to bring Turabi to trial. This would put the Government in an awkward position, because Turabi's defence would expose many facts that the Government would rather stayed secret (PNC members are already threatening to do this). The longer Turabi stays in detention, the greater the government dilemma grows.

There are some indications of the repercussions of the MoU in western Sudan. The Bashir-Turabi split has had a regional/racial dimension from the outset, with the western faction within the Islamist movement broadly aligned with Turabi's PNC, and the central/northern faction aligned with Bashir. The split raised fears of renewed armed conflict in Darfur, which did not materialise. Recent reports from el Geneina indicate that, subsequent to the SPLM-PNC accord, these fears may be belatedly realised. There are credible accounts of a resurgence in militia activity and killings targetted at potential or actual PNC supporters.

## **The Call of Sudan and the LEI**

On 1 March, Sadiq el Mahdi and Mulana Mohamed Osman al Mirghani met in Cairo and issued the 'Call of Sudan'. This was a response to the Memorandum of Understanding reached between the SPLA and the PNC of Hassan al Turabi. In this, the two Sayeds called

for a peaceful resolution of the Sudan conflict, including ending the state of emergency outside zones of military operations, freeing political prisoners, and relaunching the Libyan-Egyptian initiative (LEI). Subsequently, Sadiq has been talking of a 'Third Way' in Sudan that involves a broad-based government, focussing attention on peace, a new constitutional order, reforming government institutions, and relaunching the economy.

The 'Call of Sudan' was positively received by President Bashir who noted that it was a step forward. This move appeared to mark a convergence between the Umma and the DUP, perhaps as the prelude to a reconciliation with Bashir under Libyan-Egyptian auspices. Such a three-way reconciliation has always been the preferred option of the Egyptians in particular. The possibility of further movement in this direction seemed to be increased by intense activity in early March in Cairo and Tripoli, with indications that the major meeting of the LEI would be held in early May. The Egyptians were holding out the prospect of a high-level meeting, the formation of a secretariat, and rapid progress towards a settlement. The NDA dampened this enthusiasm somewhat by insisting that initial meetings be at a lower level, and requesting that the IGAD DoP be adopted as the basis for the negotiations. Subsequently, the LEI has again vanished from view.

The NDA leaders in Khartoum, arrested in December, were brought to court on 18 March. The trial was postponed until April. After a period last year in which Sudan held rather few political detainees, the issue of political detentions has returned to the domestic agenda and is also an issue for the international community. For example it is increasingly prominent in the EU-Sudan dialogue.

## **The IGAD Process**

The IGAD Partners' Forum meeting proceeded in Rome in March. The same issues were raised as before: the IPF required the IGAD Sudan Peace Secretariat to respond to its report issued in October, and to set a date for convening an IGAD Summit. No further funds would be forthcoming until this took place.

In effect, the IPF merely maintained the status quo. The reasons for this are continuing lack of clarity and cohesion among IPF members.

1. Most IPF members have given up on IGAD. But they do not have any alternative in sight. As a result, they are continuing to drip-feed IGAD and keep it alive, at least until there is another process.
2. Italy, as IPF co-chair, continues to be committed to IGAD, and is wedded to procedural aspects of the process. The Italian government's decision-making is puzzling to many of its partners in the IPF. For example it has been active in trying to bring Libya into the Forum despite its certain knowledge of U.S. opposition.

A week later, President Moi travelled to Khartoum with a document entitled 'A scenario for the settlement of the conflict in Southern Sudan.' This is loosely based on the IGAD DoP but has a number of simplifications and omissions that are certain to make it unacceptable to the SPLA. An exact copy of the document is appended.

The Kenyan State House 'scenario' raises a number of questions.

1. How is it possible for the IGAD Chairman to produce a proposal that does not reflect the substantive work done within the IGAD Sudan Peace Secretariat?

2. Who was consulted in the preparation of the Scenario?
3. What happens if the GoS decides to take the Moi 'Scenario' as a serious proposal?

The communique from the presidential meeting did not mention the Kenyan proposal but merely reaffirmed the commitment to an IGAD Summit intended to pave the way for an end to the war. No date was set.

## **The Warfront**

The most surprising element in the war has been the lack of military activity during March. Contrary to expectations that the dry season would witness major GoS efforts to move towards Rumbek, the South has been remarkably quiet, including a marked reduction in aerial bombardment. The most likely reason for this is the GoS anticipation of the UN Security Council debate on lifting sanctions, which was scheduled for mid-April.

Cdr Peter Gadet overran and destroyed the small town of Nyal—it is unclear whether he was acting on SPLA orders or not. In the Nuba Mountains, fighting has continued with SPLA raids. There have been small actions in the East and Southern Blue Nile. Bombing raids have continued in Southern Blue Nile and the Nuba Mountains, but there is an unstated cessation of bombing in much of the South. A new conscription drive began in early March.

The early April visit to the oilfields by a large contingent of senior officers may well prefigure an important offensive in that area. However the air crash that killed 15 of them (see above) may have stalled immediate military action.

## **Developments in the Region**

Ethiopia: internal problems within the TPLF surfaced in March with the most severe threat to Prime Minister Meles Zenawi since the current government came to power almost ten years ago. After intense discussion and politicking, Meles emerged on top, but now faces the challenge of pushing through his reformist agenda and building a wider constituency of support. Regarding Sudan, the impact of these internal divisions means that Ethiopia is unlikely to follow an assertive policy. The key components of its Sudan policy are complexity and caution. Ethiopia's chief regional concerns will remain overwhelmingly Eritrea and secondarily Somalia, where it is resolutely opposed to the influence of Al Ittihad, which is powerfully represented in the recently-established Mogadishu government of President Abdi Kassim Salat Hassan. Addis Ababa's immediate concerns with Khartoum are likely to focus on:

1. Pushing the GoS to restrain Al Ittihad in Somalia.
2. Cooperation on the extraction of oil from the Gambela-Upper Nile border (the geology of the area means that oil reserves in Ethiopian territory are more economically extracted from Sudanese territory and then pumped back into Ethiopia through a pipeline).
3. Establishing transport links from northern Ethiopia to Port Sudan, as an alternative to access to the sea through Eritrea.

Uganda: the Ugandan elections produced a victory for President Museveni, but not before his principal challenger, Dr Kizza Besigye, provided a severe shock. There is no doubt of President Museveni's personal commitment to Southern Sudan and his personal friendship

with Dr John Garang. However, it is evident that the SPLM has so far not cultivated a constituency of support in Uganda beyond that of the President and some senior members of the ruling Movement. This is problematic, because Museveni's involvement in the DRC and to a lesser extent Sudan is an issue of growing controversy in Uganda. Some within the SPLM are beginning to question the wisdom of relying on a leader-focussed approach, recalling the disaster that befell the SPLM after a similar strategy in Ethiopia collapsed with the defeat of President Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1991. During the election campaign, Museveni accused Besigye of obtaining support from Uganda's regional adversaries including Rwanda and Sudan.

Meanwhile, the election campaign over, negotiations between Kampala and Khartoum over the Lord's Resistance Army and the return of abducted Ugandan children will resume in earnest under the mediation of the Carter Centre. It is unlikely that these will lead rapidly to a normalisation of Uganda-Sudan relations.

Kenya: the Kenyan proposal to end the war has potentially disturbing implications for the SPLM. The Kenyan President's 'scenario' outlined is closer to Khartoum's position than to the SPLM's. Although the initiative is likely to flop, we should not rule out the possibility that the GoS may accept the proposal, while the SPLA would be compelled to turn it down. This might embarrass the SPLA with Nairobi.

Eritrea: the Asmara initiative, reflecting the outcome of the NDA Congress in September, appears to be dead. Relations between Khartoum and Asmara have soured significantly. The Eritrean leadership is preoccupied also with internal problems, notably the fact that the congress of the ruling PFDJ was due to be held in late February or early March, but no date has been set.

More widely, we can see the emergence of oil diplomacy in the Horn. The fact that Sudan is now an oil exporter is beginning to transform its relations with its neighbours, notably Ethiopia. This is likely to result in the development of strong economic interests among Sudan's neighbours in stable relations with Khartoum.

## **The Debate in Washington D.C.**

Unexpectedly, the issue of Sudan has emerged as a major foreign policy challenge to the Bush Administration. Two recent reports have focussed the debate.

1. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) report, co-authored by Francis Deng and Stephen Morrison. This advocates a peace settlement, instigated by the U.S. with the support of other key partners (specifically the UK and Norway), based upon a 'one country, two systems' approach. The CSIS report has been criticised for (a) overlooking the role of democratisation in Sudan, both North and South, (b) neglecting the NDA and (c) paying insufficient attention to the need to sustain pressure on Khartoum. However, the report's major role—to emphasise that there is a possible U.S. strategic role aimed at achieving a negotiated peace—has been well achieved. It provides a potential roadmap for peace. Its greatest strength is that none of its critics have yet come with a practical alternative aimed at achieving peace in the foreseeable future.
2. The Congressional Commission on International Religious Freedom report, under the leadership of Elliot Abrams, advocates a continuation—indeed an intensification—of the

former U.S. policy of isolating and confronting Khartoum, providing support to the opposition. This policy, which has support among many in the religious right in Congress, advocates direct support to the SPLA, plus capital market sanctions against oil companies operating in Sudan and the imposition of a no-fly zone on Southern Sudan.

As more evidence of extreme abuses by Sudan Government forces in the oilfields comes to light, and the campaign against slavery continues to generate publicity, the second approach is gaining the moral high ground. It has powerful friends in Washington, notably Franklin Graham, son of the evangelist Billy Graham, who has humanitarian interests in Southern Sudan. Graham has the ear of President Bush. It is probable that Congress will make strong noises about Sudan, which may influence policy.

On the other hand, most of the State Department leans towards the first approach, recognising that under the Clinton administration, policy 2 has so far failed to deliver, and doubting that the U.S. is ready to commit the necessary political and financial resources to make a serious difference in the war. But it is unclear whether the key individuals in State are ready to commit sufficient diplomatic resources and policymakers' time and energy to policy 1 to make that work either. It is quite possible that a middle way of symbolic action along both fronts will emerge, sufficient only to keep the current status quo. One consideration favouring this is that the religious right tends to champion a handful of causes around the globe, including China, Saudi Arabia and Sudan. It is unlikely that the Administration will allow a combative stance on either China or Saudi Arabia, because of powerful commercial interests, so that Sudan may emerge as the issue the religious right is given to keep it quiet.

Alternatively, it is possible that high-level leadership may decide to combine the two policies by deflecting the moral outrage against the current abuses into a policy aimed at *ending the war*, on the grounds that humanitarian concerns and human rights can only be preserved through peace. This is the force of the 5 April statement by U.S. Roman Catholic bishops.

It is remarkable how little influence Sudanese events and opinions have on this debate. The fact that the SPLA has made an agreement with Hassan al Turabi does not seem to have dented the enthusiasm of the Christian Right (which can sometimes be strongly anti-Moslem) for John Garang. Neither does the SPLA's rejection of the CSIS report figure in the State Department calculations.

## **The Sanctions Vote**

The first significant test of the U.S. Administration was due to come soon—in fact rather too soon, in mid-April—with the vote on the continuation of the very limited diplomatic sanctions imposed on Khartoum in the aftermath of the 1995 assassination attempt on President Hosni Mubarak. These sanctions are specifically tied to Sudan making progress on handing over any suspects on its territory, and cooperating with international counter-terrorism efforts. The objective facts in both these areas are not in the public domain, but U.S. counter-terrorism specialists have been in Khartoum, reportedly making modest progress. However, the key factor will be the U.S.'s wider political stand on Sudan. In the current domestic climate, it would be very difficult for the U.S. to support lifting sanctions. In November, Sudan consented to a postponement of the vote, well-knowing that the former U.S. administration would not be sympathetic. Unexpectedly, Sudan has agreed to a further postponement, until August. This heads off the scenario under which the U.S. government, not having made up its mind about its Sudan policy, felt obliged to veto any lifting of sanctions, an action that might lead hardliners in Khartoum to take the line that the policy of

appeasing the west, followed by President Bashir and Foreign Minister Mustafa Ismail, has delivered nothing, and so should be abandoned.

## **Conclusion**

The key struggle in the last month, and the coming weeks, is being fought out in Washington and not in Sudan. The U.S. is the one power that could do what is necessary to pressure the parties and the region to move towards peace. As the debates continue in Washington, it is important that they focus not just on taking a moral stand against outrage, but also seeking outcomes that can benefit the people of Sudan. Meanwhile, in Sudan and among its immediate neighbours, all parties have been weakened by recent events, lessening the chances of any of them moving decisively towards peace.

Appendix: Proposal put to GoS by President Moi on 30 March 2001

A scenario for the settlement  
Of the conflict in Southern Sudan

1. Concomittant and reciprocal recognition of the SPLA and the GoS of each other; the SPLA recognizes the authority of the GoS over all the territories of the Republic of the Sudan while the GoS recognises the de facto control of the SPLA of sizeable parts of Southern Sudan.
2. A cease-fire is proclaimed concomittantly by both sides in all theatres of operations.
3. A Cease-fire Monitoring Committee is established which is composed of military observers of the IGAD member states, the OAU, the GoS and the SPLA.
4. A Transitional Period of 2/3 years is proclaimed by the GoS and the SPLA during which the following principles will apply:
  - a – Application of the DOP.
  - b – Exoneration of the areas under SPLA control of laws in vigour in other parts of the Sudan
  - c – Administration by the SPLA of all territories under its control as an interim measure on behalf of the GoS pending the final settlement of all outstanding issues of governance.
5. During the Transitional Period the following committees will be established jointly between the GoS and the SPLA to supervise the over all management of the territories under SPLA control and to address the outstanding issues of governance and administration and rehabilitation and reconstruction.
  - a – A Coordination and Liaison Committee.
  - b – Political Committee: to address the outstanding political issues.
  - c – Military and Security Committee.
  - d – Local Administration Committee.
  - e – Finance Committee.
  - f – Rehabilitation and reconstruction Committee.
  - g – Social Services Committee.
  - h – Economic and Trade Committee.
  - i – A resettlement and Reintegration Committee.
6. Concomittantly, Arrangements will be underway for the organisation of the referendum on the future of Southern Sudan. A Referendum Commission will be established to oversee the organisation of the referendum at the end of the Transitional period according to the terms negotiated by the GoS and the Southern political forces the major options being:
  - a – Federation
  - b – Confederation.
7. Organisation of elections in the whole of Sudan in the light of the political arrangements agreed upon by all the political forces in North and South.