

Prospects for Peace in Sudan

Briefing: October 2007

Overview

1. The GoS is currently run by President Bashir and the Assistant President, Nafie Ali Nafie. Both can be characterized as “hardline”: Bashir is proud and stubborn, Nafie is a security man with no love for democracy who is deeply suspicious of western agendas. Nafie’s ascendancy is at the expense of Ali Osman Taha. In part it reflects the western approach of failing to deliver on peace-related promises and instead punishing the GoS regardless.
2. The Sudanese state is reverting to its security identity with dispensing cash as its favoured instrument of control. This strategy is currently imperiled by the financial crisis arising from lower oil revenues, mismanagement of the financial sector, and U.S. sanctions. International leverage could now have some traction on GoS strategy if used smartly.
3. The GoSS in Juba is competing with the NCP/security as a centre of patronage, distributing largesse in order to try to control the loyalties of the numerous armed groups in South Sudan and its borderlands. This approach has succeeded in neutralizing the threat posed by the SSDF and may well succeed in winning the conditional loyalty of groups in Northern Sudan. However it presents serious challenges to the agenda of security sector reform and army transformation and downsizing.
4. Kordofan is becoming more and more volatile and is a probable locus for future hostilities. There are many diverse flashpoints in all parts of Kordofan which warrant careful monitoring.
5. Darfur is chaotic with no-one exercising control. The JEM dissident/SLA-Unity attack on AMIS shows the extent to which the movements lack political leadership. AMIS is now at the point of disintegration, its credibility and morale plunging to an all-time low. The challenges for UNAMID are all the greater.
6. Darfur’s peace process as currently designed is unlikely to have much traction with either the GoS or the movements. All the parties to the conflict know that the real action is elsewhere, either on the battlefield (which is the primary arena for several groups), or in the auctions of loyalties between Khartoum and neighbouring capitals, or (most importantly) in the continuing games played between Khartoum and Washington DC. While Sudan remains a hot topic in U.S. presidential politics there is unlikely to be progress towards peace.

The Nafie Ascendancy

7. Nafie Ali Nafie is clearly the most powerful figure in the GoS next to the President. His ascendancy was clear when he took over the Darfur file which Majzoub al Khalifa had held until his death. Nafie's history and character are well known to those who have watched Sudan over the last 18 years. He is notable for his prominence in the government's security apparatus and his role in sponsoring international jihadism in the early 1990s, including a leading role in the assassination attempt against Husni Mubarak. Nafie is no democrat and regards the NCP as an extension of the state security apparatus rather than the other way round. He will be reluctant to enter an electoral process without a very firm indication that the NCP position will, at minimum, not be reduced. Nafie's personal concern over accountability for past human rights abuses and involvement in terrorism will influence the GoS position on issues such as the ICC. When Ali Osman Taha proposed that the GoS engage seriously in peace talks, first with the SPLM and then the Darfurian movements, in the expectation that peace agreements would lead to rewards from the international community (especially the U.S.), Nafie was among his critics. Nafie argued that whatever the GoS concedes, the U.S. will ask for more. He still holds this position and does not expect good faith engagement from the international community.

8. While most Sudanese political analysts greet his ascendancy with dismay, Nafie does have some important redeeming qualities. The most important of these is that he is a systematic and effective operator who can be relied upon to follow through and implement an agreed deal. There is another significant advantage to having hardliners in power. They do not need to watch their backs. A deal made with Nafie in the ascendancy is unlikely to be unraveled by other members of the security cabal.

9. Nafie's major triumph in 2006 was the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement. Heralded at the time (by the GoS) as an example of how peace could be secured without international engagement, this is now looking less and less secure. The deal has split the Eastern Front and (in a well-established pattern) led to eastern politicians establishing factions aligned either with the NCP or against it. The Eastern Front leadership is unhappy with the very slow pace of implementation of the agreement and the lack of real power delegated to those who have joined the government. The GoS is unhappy at the way in which the Eritrean government has used the NCP to insert Eritrean citizens into Sudanese institutions. Nonetheless, it is the kind of "retail" peace agreement that the GoS prefers.

10. The elections will be the biggest challenge for Nafie. The electoral process will penalize those who have been most closely associated with the regime's excesses during the 1990s. Ali Osman Taha had been moderately successful in associating himself with the reformist, democratizing trend and the election campaign and the vote will strengthen his hand.

11. The sudden death of Majzoub al Khalifa has left a number of individuals on his payroll suddenly cut off. This has weakened the NCP in Darfur. As the names on the lists

have leaked, some unexpected individuals have shown up which will cause embarrassment among some Darfurian activists, both in Sudan and abroad.

12. Nafie's ascendancy reflects the vindication of his diagnosis of western governments' behaviour towards Sudan. International policy instruments are now reduced almost entirely to pressure and threat with no expectation of good faith on either side.

State Finance

13. The GoS is suffering a financial crisis arising from three factors: (a) a sharp decline in oil revenues due to production not meeting expectations in both quantity and quality, (b) banking collapses on account of mismanagement (in turn related to the poor regulation of the financial services industry dating back to the Islamization of the sector in the 1970s and '80s and the use of Islamic financial institutions as parallel mechanisms for regime finance in the 1990s); and (c) U.S. targeted sanctions, which have struck government financial transactions including oil exports considerably harder than the GoS (and skeptics of the sanctions) anticipated.

14. One result is economic austerity measures including shortages affecting the population in general. The economic boom in Khartoum and the surrounding areas was virtually the only good news for the NCP. But the contrast between the conspicuous wealth of the elite and the continuing struggle of the majority, even in the wealthy towns, is undermining the standing of the government. The inability of the government to respond to the floods has further damaged its credibility.

15. A second impact is a sharp decrease in the financial resources available to the NCP and security for greasing the wheels of patronage. As the NCP-security regime has recently become accustomed to an expanding budget and commensurate possibilities for largesse, this is likely to cause considerable discontent among the regime's clients. The signature instrument of the Sudanese security officer is a suitcase full of cash.

16. The financial crisis leaves the GoS weakened in the short term and gives the international community, notably the U.S., much-increased leverage. This leverage must be seen in the context of Bashir and Nafie's premise of distrust of western intentions.

GoSS

17. The GoSS is suffering a financial crisis also. The immediate cause is the knock-on effect of the financial crisis in Khartoum, and the consequent reduction in transfers from central government to Juba. The GoSS sought a general lifting of U.S. sanctions (which it failed to get) and a second-best South Sudan-specific sanctions waiver (which it has obtained). An underlying cause of the financial crisis is financial mismanagement by the GoSS itself. The GoSS budget enjoys a budget of over \$1.5 billion (comparable to Uganda and higher than the official Sudan government budget in the late 1990s). But these funds are not being effectively handled.

18. The GoSS/SPLM is engaging in a form of retail politics comparable to that practiced by the NCP/security. The core of this is utilizing patronage to ensure regime security. Within the South, this is reflected in a vast SPLA budget (about \$550 million) with generous wages for SPLA members. The SPLA has undergone an extreme form of rank inflation with literally hundreds of generals, each of whom requires a staff, bodyguards and vehicles. This is a legacy of the absorption of the SSDF and the way in which the GoS bid up the price of the loyalty of SSDF commanders by inflating their ranks, the fact that the SPLA had itself pursued a similar strategy in the 1990s, and the need to align the ranks and privileges of the two armies following the January 2006 Juba Declaration. The SPLA is retaining the loyalty of commanders across the South through money. This approach is in tension with the demand for reforming the army and reducing its size.

19. The SPLM/SPLA has also pursued this strategy in Northern Sudan. There is widespread admiration and support for the SPLM among many Northern citizens because of its sustained and credible opposition to the GoS during the long years of war, and its “New Sudan” and democratization manifesto pledges. But the SPLM leadership is very cautious about rapidly expanding the party’s membership. Rather, it is focusing on building loyalty among specific constituencies in Northern Sudan. A bold and revealing exemplar of this was the SPLA’s attempt to recruit among the Baggara tribes of South Kordofan during September which closely mirrored the GoS’s own strategy of recruiting militia in South Sudan. This was a violation of the CPA insofar as the recruitment was military rather than political. It indicates that part of the GoSS strategy for deterring Khartoum is for the SPLA to possess the capability of spreading serious disorder in Northern Sudan.

20. The GoSS/SPLA has begun its discussions and planning for its Defence White Paper. This is a vital exercise in strategic and coordinated planning. The patronage approach to security is perilous because when loyalty depends upon cash payment it is conditional, and the NCP/security are masters at the game and have greater resources to dispense (although they also have more claims on those funds). If mishandled, this security strategy would leave the SPLA itself (in its current bloated form) as the greatest threat to the security of Southern Sudan.

21. Salva Kiir is correct to draw attention to the dangers of another war between North and South. However, it is clearly in his interest to raise this spectre now, given the financial demands that he is making from Khartoum and the international community Khartoum, so his statements should be seen in that light.

Kordofan

22. Kordofan is the crucible of Sudan; the most likely flashpoint for serious violence that would have the potential of unraveling the CPA and creating a new humanitarian disaster. While a crisis in Darfur or the South can largely be contained to those regions, a crisis in Kordofan is likely to spill over to other parts of Sudan. What makes Kordofan particularly volatile is the large number of potential sparks for crisis.

23. The Muglad incident, in which the SPLA tried to recruit soldiers from the Baggara in violation of the CPA, shows the extent to which the Baggara have detached themselves from the NCP, and the confidence of the SPLA that it has the sympathies of people in Northern Sudan and the means to organize important groups.

24. JEM has clearly signaled its intent to expand hostilities to Kordofan, with Khalil Ibrahim selecting a new deputy from the Shamama (Misiriya) group. Given the tribal base of JEM it is likely that it will try to marshal support mainly from the Zaghawa diaspora communities in Kordofan (most of them very long-settled, who no longer speak Zaghawa). It would be consistent for the GoS to respond by clamping down on these groups, hitherto uninvolved in conflict, perhaps forcibly displacing some of them.

25. Other movements are marshalling discontent throughout North Kordofan. There are numerous unemployed and frustrated graduates in el Obeid and other towns, some of them mobilized as development and youth associations. Weapons are readily available.

26. The SPLM-administered areas of the Nuba Mountains remain as a separate enclave from the rest of South Kordofan, with their own administration and security. Potential flashpoints in between Nuba and Baggara will arise towards the end of the year as pastoralist migrations bring them into potential conflict with Nuba farmers. Conflict was narrowly averted earlier in the year at Lagowa and there is a growing number of land-related incidents in south-east Kordofan. Good rains will lessen the pressure on pastures but the potential for conflict remains high.

27. Abyei still the most likely flashpoint for hostilities given the high stakes and unresolved issues.

Darfur: AMIS after Haskanita

28. The JEM dissident/SLA-Unity attack on the AMIS force in Haskanita on 29 September demonstrates the immaturity of the Darfur armed movements' political leadership and the weakness of AMIS.

29. The supposed justification for the attack included a claim that AMIS was in radio contact with the Sudan air force during aerial bombardment of rebel positions in the town and AU silence over the air attacks. The fact that the commanders responsible did not raise a complaint and instead attacked the base shows a spectacular failure of political judgement. Quite possibly, the motivation was (also) to make a show of force to try to compel the UN and AU to recognize the breakaway JEM group and include it in the peace talks, and to obtain vehicles and ammunition from a soft target.

30. AMIS was already suffering from low morale and lack of respect from Darfurians. Its forces were shamefully under-supplied. Darfurians were already noting that AMIS soldiers could not protect themselves and so could not be expected to protect civilians. AMIS soldiers who have put up with so much neglect and disrespect may not be ready to tolerate it for much longer.

31. The initial AU response to the attack, which stressed the AU's commitment to remaining in Sudan, did not rise to the challenge. AMIS's dilemma is that if it responds robustly, local perceptions that it is biased towards the GoS will simply be confirmed. But if it fails to respond robustly its credibility will decline practically to zero and it will be considered fair game by Darfur's armed groups.

32. International activists need to be careful that their routine ascription of guilt to the GoS, their tendency to describe any air attack as "indiscriminate", and their critique of the AU, do not end up giving the rebels a sense of impunity.

Darfur: the Conflict

33. The fighting that began in Adila in August, including the JEM-SLA Unity incursion into Wad Banda in Kordofan and the subsequent GoS counterattack on Haskanita, was the first major fighting between the Sudan army and the rebel movements for almost a year. The significance of this incident includes:

- a. The recklessness of the JEM-SLA Unity political decision to escalate the conflict, especially with the Kordofan attack;
- b. The relative restraint of the GoS response, which did not involve militia but only regular forces (including the air force, which attacked Adila when the rebels were there and attacked Haskanita in an attempt to kill the rebel leadership);
- c. The extent to which local political rivalries are driving the conflict;
- d. The swift condemnation of the rebel offensive across the political spectrum, even by influential figures in the rebel movement (such as Suleiman Jamous); and
- e. The inability of the Sudan armed forces to mount a serious ground challenge to the rebels. Nearly five years after the rebels began serious raids, the army has yet to develop the capabilities for desert style warfare.

34. The style of armed conflict that is developing is one of opportunistic raids by the rebels, at great speed over wide distances. The advantage is always with the attacker. The GoS has no effective response to this. It is a method of warfare with deep roots in Sudan and the Sahel, in which looting and extortion go hand-in-hand with political ambition. When this emerged in Chad in the 1970s, political scientists first applied the word "warlord" in an African context.

35. The re-escalation of the conflict shows that nay-sayers and aggressive opportunists have the upper hand and the more reasonable figures are marginalized. This reflects the distorted incentives that have been apparent over the last few years. Those who signed the DPA or DoC were marginalized by the GoS and ignored by the international community. Those who tried to organize the non-signatories for compromise (Jar el Nabi Abdel Karim, Suleiman Marajan and some of Ahmed Abdel Shafi's people) were not supported and have now become marginalized themselves (Suleiman Jamous is the last

hope for this group). Those who held out (Abdel Wahid) or escalated the war (Khalil Ibrahim, Abu Garda, Sharif Harir) have gained in international stature.

Darfur: the Peace Process

36. The current joint UN-AU mediation effort is unlikely to make progress within the timeframe envisaged.

37. Thus far the mediators have not fully explored the concessions that the GoS may be ready to make. There is very little incentive for the GoS to agree to any proposals on the table that represent a significant enhancement of the DPA. Nafie will not respond to promises from western governments because he does not believe their good faith. The GoS may be ready to make some unilateral gestures (e.g. on compensation) but many within the GoS will oppose giving away something for nothing.

38. The signatories, especially Minni Minawi, have the potential to make real trouble. They are certain to be losers. Minawi's forces can be violent and ruthless. The measures envisaged in the DPA for controlling them (such as restricting them to specified areas and providing them with food and other forms of assistance) have not been forthcoming. (This is in itself a poor advertisement for others who want to make peace.) The best mechanism for controlling Minawi's forces is probably to integrate them immediately into the Sudan armed forces, turning a deaf ear to the protests from international advocacy groups.

39. The non-signatory groups present in Arusha are likely to agree only on a hard-line position which is not amenable to compromise. Some of them (e.g. Khalil Ibrahim and Sherif Harir) are vehemently opposed to the CPA and are wholly opposed to the basic philosophy of a Darfur peace agreement that is a buttress to the CPA. Many of these groups will not want to hold elections on schedule in 2009, knowing they will not win. As international pressures mount for compromise, some of them may split away and express their readiness to sign a modestly amended DPA, reprising the experience of Abuja. A peace deal which is signed by some and not others is a workable proposition, but only if it is attractive for the others to join, and the pressures on them are consistent and enforced. (This was not the case after Abuja.)

40. Abdel Wahid is calling for peace and security to be established in Darfur before he is ready to negotiate with the Sudan government. Should his preconditions be met (which is not impossible, if UNAMID is even modestly effective) then there will be no need for the GoS to negotiate with him. The SPLM efforts to entice him to join have not succeeded.

41. Negotiations cannot succeed without involving the Arabs. If the Arabs are not fully engaged, they are likely to move back into the GoS camp, become spoilers, and create serious trouble for UNAMID.

42. The preconditions for a security arrangements agreement are not in place. An estimated six months of preparatory work with field commanders will be necessary. If the

mediation wishes to retain the services of worthwhile security specialists it will need to do what the AU mediation failed to do in Abuja, which is follow their advice and take this patient approach.

Darfur: Peacekeeping

43. UNAMID's arrival can at best be expected for the second quarter of 2008. The administrative complexities of the hybrid arrangement combined with the logistical challenges of operating in Darfur mean that the operation is likely, at best, to be inefficient. The factor running in UNAMID's favour is that it is arriving three years after the end of major hostilities, at a time when even a modestly effective peace support presence on the ground can make a big difference to dampening down Darfur's local disputes.

44. Major questions of long-term vision, strategy and doctrine remain. Three major challenges exist in terms of developing an effective concept of operations:

- a. Ceasefire monitoring under conditions of multiple armed groups and very high mobility of forces. Joint patrolling ("three men in a jeep")
- b. Protection and policing of IDP camps. UN police including formed police units are being dispatched to Darfur without any operational concepts for how to do their jobs.
- c. Arms control among the military groups. Many politicians and some diplomats continue to speak of disarmament, including of the Janjaweed, as though it could actually be done. There are two possible approaches to arms control, (i) consensual, reciprocal, staged restrictions on the usage of arms among all groups and (ii) absorption of armed groups into the Sudan armed forces and paramilitaries, whereby they are brought under control and discipline and ultimately disarmed. Both could be pursued.

45. The arrival of UNAMID forces has the potential to achieve two significant advances. One is that Darfurians will be obliged to lower their expectations for what they can expect from international troops. This will be salutary, insofar as it will pass the onus for "saving" Darfur back to the political leaders of Darfur. Second, if UNAMID is even modestly effective, it will create sufficient security in many areas for people to become confident that peace has indeed arrived, which will in turn mean that there is little reason for the GoS to negotiate with exiled leaders of the movements who pose no military threat.

46. Next Steps

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48. A reserve plan for peace in Darfur

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