

## **Sudan: Analysis and Prospects**

(focusing on Darfur)

**June 2006**

### **Overview**

1. Politics in Sudan is ever in flux. The weeks since the signature of the DPA on May 5 have been typically untidy. There has been little celebration of the DPA and there is strong opposition from many quarters. Little has been implemented.
2. Minni Minawi's existing political infrastructure and constituencies will not be capable of mobilizing sufficient support from among Darfurians to implement the DPA. He does not enjoy sufficient support even from his own tribe and his own commanders. However, one of Minni's strengths is his awareness of his own limitations and he may, with guidance, be able to put together a workable group of Darfurians who can run the institutions set up by the DPA. Unfortunately, there are few Darfurians in public life who are seen as purely "technocrats" and not politically aligned.
3. The DPA's ceasefire plan is workable. But there is still no overall plan for long-term security arrangements in Darfur, including a mechanism for the control of arms in the hands of tribal militia. This shortcoming will need to be remedied in the coming weeks and certainly before the Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultation is convened. Until this plan is developed, it is very unlikely that there will be sufficient confidence in the DPA from the Arab tribes and other armed groups for the implementation of the ceasefire to proceed smoothly.
4. The strengths of the DPA lie in its details (which are still not appreciated by most Sudanese). No shared vision was reached by the parties on the basic concepts in the DPA, and to the extent that those concepts exist, they are themselves obscured by numerous ad hoc re-workings of the text. One of the challenges for the DDDC is to present the DPA in such a way that its core concepts stand out in a way that is understandable and readily accepted by Darfurians.
5. Patience with Abdel Wahid has run out. But his viewpoint cannot be ignored and, in the short term, his decision remains critical to the credibility of the DPA. Despite his bluster and the misleading advice of those who write his letters and petitions on his behalf, he is articulating views that resonate with most Darfurians. Little can be done to influence Abdel Wahid's own political decision. Better is to accommodate the valid points in his critique as the DPA is implemented.

### **Threats to Security in Darfur**

6. The most immediate threat to the DPA comes from the military opposition from Chad, JEM and splinter groups from the SLA including Sharif Harir and some of the “Group of 19” that split from Abdel Wahid. Despite Idriss Deby’s professed support for the DPA, in practice he and his family members are continuing to support military action in Darfur aimed at the Sudan Government and, in recent days, Minni Minawi. Deby has substantially re-armed JEM. The hollowness of the February 8 Tripoli Agreement between Sudan and Chad has never been more apparent—there has been absolutely no significant implementation, and the parts of the DPA that are silent or muted on the Chad-Sudan border and foreign combatants out of deference to the Tripoli Agreement are now an obvious weakness. The case of Deby, JEM and the SLA fragments is appropriately dealt with by the AU Peace and Security Council and the UN Security Council.

7. A second threat is from the Arab tribes especially those mobilized as Janjawiid. The Arabs were relatively quiescent during the Abuja talks because they were well-represented in the GoS delegation and were in constant contact with Abdel Wahid (principally but not exclusively through Ibrahim Madibo). The decision of Madibo to break ranks with Abdel Wahid on May 17, and contact the African Union to offer support to the DPA, is potentially an important stabilizing factor. Much depends on whether the GoS and Minni can agree on a mechanism for bringing Madibo and other independents formerly aligned with the Movements into the process of implementing the DPA.

8. The SLA-Abdel Wahid cannot directly pose any military threat, even if it is drawn into the Chadian ambit. But unless a credible political alternative emerges to fill the vacuum of leadership among the Fur and other large non-Arab tribes, the DPA will be clouded by lack of legitimacy among large sections of the Darfur populace.

9. Demonstrations against the DPA in IDP camps and cities (including Khartoum) have been orchestrated by the Popular Congress, Umma Party and SLM-Abdel Wahid. The PCP and Umma Party see these as a ways of paralyzing both DPA and CPA and bringing down the Government of National Unity. Abdel Wahid sees them as an endorsement of his own position. While overestimating his own popular support, Abdel Wahid also recognizes that he has no common political platform with the PCP and Umma.

10. The signature of the DPA provides a mechanism for the UN to dispatch troops to Darfur. This will be an opportunity for better protection of the civilian population and the implementation of many security provisions in the DPA. However, the success of a UN mission in Darfur depends on its approach to the long-term challenge of building confidence among all the communities in Darfur. In that respect, it is essential that it fills in one of the most significant gaps in the DPA, namely the weak provisions for community arms control.

11. A plan for community arms control was drafted within the AU Mediation but was, in the final instance, reduced to just Paragraph 453, which kicks the problem down the road to the Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultation. (This was against the advice of both this writer and Col. Tod Wilson.) The weakness of this provision underlies the Arabs’ distrust

of the security provisions of the DPA. It will without doubt lead to an inadequate GoS plan for disarming the Janjaweed and foot-dragging on implementing the plan.

12. As a matter of urgency, the AU's implementation team should draw up a plan for community disarmament which can be discussed by the signatory parties and others, with a view to either (a) a memorandum of understanding on how to implement this part of the DPA and/or (b) a detailed discussion on the issue at the DDDC.

### **The GoS**

13. The GoS is, characteristically, playing its hand with tactical adeptness but strategic myopia. It is declaring the DPA as a triumph, a message that instantly causes widespread skepticism about the contents of the Agreement among the Sudanese populace. It has shown little seriousness in implementing the DPA in the three weeks since its signature, preferring business as usual. It is providing plenty of ammunition to its critics, including Abdel Wahid, who argue that it cannot be trusted.

14. During the Abuja peace talks, the NCP saw the SLM-Abdel Wahid as its preferred political partner (just as the Umma Party identified SLM-Minni and the Popular Congress Party of Hassan al Turabi was aligned with JEM). With Abdel Wahid's refusal to sign the DPA, the NCP is now uncertain of its approach. Some are still insistent that Abdel Wahid should be brought on board. Others including Majzoub al Khalifa prefer to win over his people one-by-one. They made a significant start with Abdel Rahman Musa and his group on May 5, and have good contacts with many field commanders and other political leaders, and are doubtless using their powers of patronage to good effect. They were not, however, involved in Madibo's decision to support the DPA. The NCP's tactic may mean that they forgo the greater prize of winning over Abdel Wahid himself.

15. During Abuja, the GoS relied on the AU's firm instinct for keeping the state intact. The AU's most basic interest in the Darfur talks was to maintain a respectable state in Sudan and in particular to ensure that the unity of the country should not be jeopardized. The AU delivered on that, drafting a DPA that impinged on the CPA to the absolute minimum. The NCP and SPLM now have an opportunity to use the combination of CPA and DPA to build the best possible case for the unity of Sudan. Thus far, both are missing it. The NCP is too focused on gaining whatever marginal advantage it can accrue in Darfur (especially with an eye to the 2009 elections) while the SPLM has failed to grasp the opportunity of a political partnership with the SLM (which admittedly has not been a forthcoming partner itself).

16. The GoS is switching its immediate attention to the East, where Eritrea is playing an unusually constructive role in facilitating peace talks. This is welcome. However, it would be a shame if the piecemeal approach to resolving Sudan's conflicts continues and the opportunity for an overall assessment of the country's difficult transition is lost.

### **Minni Minawi**

17. Minni Minawi's position is precarious, and he himself is pessimistic about his personal and political prospects. He is justifiably fearful about taking a role in government without gaining some additional political capital. His people are still rehearsing reservations about the DPA. If Minni is to join the GoNU in good standing, some rapid progress should be made on these issues.

18. Minni's political base consists largely of three groups. First is his own family and clan, which are not socially or politically significant among the Zaghawa, but have achieved prominence through Minni's leadership. Minni's own social base has been weakened because he or his troops have killed several Zaghawa tribal leaders, and he is not backed by figures with more social standing and community support, such as Sharif Harir or Suleiman Jamous. Recent Zaghawa politics has been marked by political assassination and Minni fears that he may be a target.

19. Second are the military commanders of the SLA who are tied to him because of shared comradeship during the war. This base is also limited: most of Minni's support among these commanders arose because he was able to dispense largesse in the form of arms or money provided by Chad or Libya. The NCP may fill this gap, but it would be more logical and consistent for it to keep Minni weak by continuing to support its traditional allies and play divide-and-rule among the Zaghawa.

20. Minni's third support group has been the Umma Party, which was a financier and political backer. Many of the non-Zaghawa associated with Minni's group had links to the Umma Party. The Umma Party has been the most vociferous critic of the DPA and has resolutely condemned it. Some of the statements by erstwhile members of Minni's group (e.g. Ibrahim Ibrahim) bear the imprint of the Umma critique.

21. Minni's vulnerability has led him into an unaccustomed coordination with Abdel Wahid. Perhaps too late, the two have realized that they need each other. Minni will need to learn new political skills very rapidly if he is to build the kinds of coalitions necessary for him to lead Darfur. His best option would be to find politically-neutral Darfurian technocrats to nominate for leading positions. Unfortunately, almost every Darfurian in public life has some known or suspected political alignment, making Minni's task exceptionally hard.

### **Abdel Wahid al Nur**

22. Abdel Wahid remains an important figure in Darfur. For all his shortcomings, he is one of the few political leaders in the Darfur opposition who talks to all groups, and who appreciates the importance of inter-tribal coalition building. Since May 5, his criticisms of the DPA have contained a core of valid points. Abdel Wahid remains a profoundly frustrating interlocutor. He has missed—and continues to miss—vital political opportunities. He has some truly irresponsible advisors. But without him, the implementation of the DPA will be extremely difficult.

23. The tragedy of Abdel Wahid is that he only articulated his core concerns when it was too late. He trusted his well-educated entourage to put forward negotiating positions that got him nowhere, and only revealed his own, rather local, priorities after May 5. These concerns—more compensation for dispossessed families, assurances of security on return to original villages, better representation in local government and (oddly enough) better representation of Arab leaders in local government and security mechanisms—are respectable. It is of course, too late, and Abdel Wahid can only blame himself and his team for this failure. But the signatories to the DPA, the AU and international partners would be well-advised to take these concerns into account in the implementation of the DPA.

24. In the week immediately following the May 5 signing of the DPA, there is no doubt that a majority of Darfurians opposed the DPA. They saw only the negative headlines of Movements' unmet demands and many feared the prospect of a GoS-Zaghawa alliance to control the region. The denunciations by Khalil and Abdel Wahid were heard and resonated. Demonstrations in Darfur, Khartoum and other towns revealed the depth of distrust of the GoS and anything it signs up to. As the weeks have passed, most community leaders have swung round to support the DPA, including many of the political leaders who have sympathized with or openly supported the SLM. The main mechanism for convincing these leaders has been exploration of the main points of contention in the DPA, leading to their gradual realization that the Agreement contains many good things, and an appreciation of the overall political balance and lack of options other than supporting the Agreement.

25. Abdel Wahid was elevated and pampered by the international community and grossly misled by some of his advisors and their friends. The strategy of isolating him and presenting him with deadlines is not, however, working. As long as the DPA remains controversial he will continue to be approached by journalists and air his opinions, and whenever his back is against the wall, his worst traits of inflexibility and posturing come to the fore. This also tends to solidify his core group. The only strategy that has ever come close to success with Abdel Wahid and his group is patient, low-level day-to-day engagement. Such engagement has the effect of convincing an increasing number of his sympathizers and entourage to support the DPA.

26. At the time of writing, it seems improbable that Abdel Wahid will sign the DPA. What does this mean? First, it means that he will become the symbol of opposition to both the DPA and CPA. As he is an essentially humane and articulate spokesman for the grievances of ordinary Sudanese, this means Abdel Wahid will remain a rallying point for all those who are disappointed and disgruntled. Any sanctions imposed on him will only increase his aura. The extent of his support will be precisely and inversely proportional to the effectiveness in implementing the DPA and CPA.

27. Second, the Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultation will be problematic. The GoS wants to turn the DDDC into a successor to its various stage-managed 'reconciliation' conferences. Minni would rather that it did not happen at all. The DPA Chapter 4 enables the two to control the Preparatory Committee, participation and agenda, which augurs ill.

28. Third, Abdel Wahid will retain the loyalty of two groups in Darfur. One is the youth, both in the camps and in the towns, who continue to be militant if ill-organized. A second is his core of Fur SLA. Many of them privately express support for the DPA and say they want him to sign it, and even say they would like to sign it in his absence, but none has taken any steps to do so. Both these constituencies can be marginalized and will not be in a position to block the implementation of the DPA. But without them, the DPA will remain unconvincing.

### **Others**

29. Three groups from within the Movements have now expressed their support for the DPA. Abdel Rahman Musa and his group declared that they were joining on May 5; Ibrahim Madibo split from Abdel Wahid and was mandated by a number of Arab leaders to declare his support on May 17, and a group of JEM commanders declared that they were “suspending” Khalil and supporting the Agreement on May 20. None are signatory parties and none have yet been formally included in the implementation process. Despite becoming apparent on May 5, this issue has still not been addressed. The AU needs legal assistance in finding the right mechanism to allow them, and others who wish to associate themselves with the DPA, to become part of the implementation of the DPA.

30. Khamis Abbaker, theoretically Abdel Wahid’s number two and the most prominent Masalit leader in the SLM, has been neglected and isolated in recent months, and has fallen within the ambit of Chad and the “Group of 19”. He is particularly sympathetic to Abdel Wahid’s demand of guarantees for return of refugees and IDPs to their original homes. It appears that a majority of Masalit leaders still oppose the DPA. Khamis is worthy of attention.

31. Arabs

32. The African Union

33. The AU remains dilatory in implementing the DPA.

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