

# **PROSPECTS FOR PEACE IN SUDAN**

## **BRIEFING**

### **AUGUST 2000-SUPPLEMENT**

Events regarding peace in Sudan are currently moving so fast that we have found it necessary to produce a supplement to the August briefing two weeks after it was issued.

#### **Overview**

#### **IGAD**

The NDA Peace Secretariat mission to Nairobi was prolonged after urgent remedial efforts by IPF members, led by the U.S., to encourage the Kenyan government to consider NDA involvement in IGAD. The Sudan Government increased the stakes with a provocative statement from its Nairobi embassy, saying that Kenyan meeting with the NDA would be considered tantamount to an act of aggression. Meanwhile, the SPLA leadership also began to modify its position and to state that it wanted the NDA in IGAD.

However, efforts to bring the NDA and IGAD together proved fruitless and the NDA Peace Secretariat delegation left disappointed.

#### **SSI**

The Preparatory Conference for the Sudanese-Sudanese Initiative, scheduled to convene on 21 August, has been postponed with no date set for resumption. The reason for the postponement was the Government's disappointment at the refusal of the DUP and USAP to join the Conference. There is considerable and growing disarray among the political forces in Khartoum. This is creating considerable problems for the Government.

#### **LEI**

The Libyan role in the LEI seems to be fading. Initially, the Libyan role was prominent because the initiative owed much to Sadiq el Mahdi, who has close ties with Libya. Subsequently, Egypt has emerged as the most important factor by far. The Libyan leader's unpredictability and readiness to make blunt and undiplomatic statements has diminished his role. The Libyan invitation to the NDA to come to Tripoli, originally for late July, has been postponed indefinitely

and may now not take place at all. This reduces the external backing enjoyed by the Umma Party, which as a consequence has to be more proactive in developing its internal role.

Visiting Khartoum on 21 August, Ali el Tariki, who heads the Africa policy for the Libyan government, made his strongest statement yet in opposition to self-determination for Southern Sudan. He claimed that this could lead to 'unsurmountable chaos' in the region. This statement was particularly disappointing for Southern Sudanese parties in Khartoum, which had hoped that the Libyans might adopt a more flexible approach on self-determination than Egypt.

## **The Eastern Front**

Since June, the NDA forces on the eastern front have been substantially reorganised. The previous Joint Military Command, that included all forces, has been dismantled. The SPLA forces have been reinforced and, apparently under Eritrean guidance, have received heavy weapons previously used by the joint forces. Senior SPLA leaders openly stated that they considered their strategic allies within the NDA to be the DUP and the Communists, thereby brushing off their other potential allies, the SDFA, SAF and Beja Congress.

By mid-August it was becoming increasingly evident that the SPLA leadership intended to mount a major military operation in eastern Sudan, with the intent of bringing down the government and if possible occupying Khartoum by force. Eritrean knowledge of and involvement in this plan is unknown. But it is known that the Eritrean leadership is angry with Sudan because of Sudanese-Ethiopian cooperation over Ethiopian military operations that resulted in the capture and recapture of Tessenei in June. Both Col. Garang and Mulana Mohamed Osman al Mirghani have expressed pro-Eritrean and anti-Ethiopian sentiments recently.

Both the SPLA and Eritrean leadership appeared to be reading U.S. intentions to the effect that the U.S. was still taking a hard line in support of a military solution. Both were taken aback by strong messages from the U.S. to the contrary.

The SPLA leadership inclination towards an intensified war in the north also generated its own debate within the SPLA, and Cdr Pagan Amum, chief of the SPLA in Eritrea, travelled to Nairobi for the SPLA leadership meeting in late August. One group within the SPLA leadership is arguing for rapid moves towards a military solution, on the grounds that the government is now weak. Another group is arguing that the SPLA's home is in the South, and that the forces now in Eritrea should be recalled to the South, where they are needed because of increased fighting. In addition, this group argues that the northern parties in the NDA are likely to go for reconciliation with Khartoum in preference to a war in the north, and thus the SPLA will find itself fighting against the entire north, on unfriendly terrain. Instead of striking a blow in the east, this group argues for mounting operations in the oil fields.

The SPLA leadership's difficulties on this front were compounded by the widely-credited rumour that he planned an incursion into Darfur. The 1991 Darfur incursion was a major political and military setback for the SPLA. Plans for another incursion were apparently drawn up without consulting the SFDA, a partner in the NDA which has a strong following in Darfur, leading to some tension between the two, and questions about the agenda of the SPLA leader.

Meanwhile, Khartoum has been increasing the pressure on Eritrea. Sadiq el Mahdi, visiting Eritrea, was asked by the Sudan government to mediate with its Eritrean counterparts. Sadiq has continued to make strongly anti-SPLA statements.

A major SPLA blow in eastern Sudan would have far-reaching and unpredictable ramifications throughout Sudan. It would certainly split the NDA and drive the northern parties towards Khartoum. It might cause disintegration in Khartoum; equally it might be the signal for the security nexus to take charge and reunite the north.