

# Prospects for Peace in Sudan

## Briefing: August 2007

### Overview

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3. The renewed energy directed into peacemaking in Darfur is welcome, but the results are most unlikely to be positive. The most likely scenario remains more of the same. Alternative plans for how to establish peace, including utilizing the 2008/09 elections as a means of creating a new legitimate leadership for Darfur, should be canvassed.

### Sudan's Crisis

4. The centre of gravity of the Sudanese crisis consists of the twin issues of national unity and democratization. Darfur's crisis is secondary.
5. "Saving" Darfur
6. The Euro-American agenda of "saving" Darfur departs more and more from the reality of Sudan with every passing month. The international politics that surrounds Darfur has rather little to do with the facts of what is happening in Darfur and what might transpire next.
7. The reality in Darfur today has the following major elements:
  - a. There is a humanitarian crisis that has become well-managed, with mortality and nutrition levels at pre-war levels. In the humanitarians' "no-go" areas most indications are that things are relatively normal.
  - b. Deaths from violence are between 100-200 per month, chiefly attributable to banditry, inter-tribal conflict, the breakdown of discipline among the SLA-Minawi group, and occasional government military action (usually unsuccessful). Aerial bombardment is extremely sporadic and has killed perhaps a dozen or so civilians this year.
  - c. The government's control of its proxies has reached breaking point. Much of the violence is among these proxies, consisting of one militia fighting another. Other Arab groups are asserting their independence from Khartoum or even aligning with the rebels.

- d. While commercial vehicles move with relative safety, humanitarian activities are subject to a high degree of robbery and extortion. This indicates a war economy.
- e. The monstrous campaigns of forced displacement of 2003-04 remain without remedy and more than two million people live miserably in displaced camps. This displaced population is the locus of important and poorly-understood social, economic and political dynamics. There is a potential for new violence following new patterns. The focus for this is likely to be the 2009 electoral process which the NCP is trying to manipulate in its favour.

8. The portrayal and impulse for action has the following major elements:

- a. The mantra that “things are getting worse.” They are getting worse in one main respect: it is more difficult and dangerous for aid agencies to operate. Fortunately that does not mean, in principle or in fact, that things are getting worse for the Darfurian people. There is continuing displacement due to localized conflict and insecurity. However, such statements are commonly taken at face value to imply that matters are worse than in 2003 or 2004 which is completely untrue.
- b. “Genocide is continuing.” This is untrue. There is an argument to be made that the Sudan government is a serial offender in committing grave atrocities during its wars and that robust action is needed to stop this from happening again, in Darfur or elsewhere. This argument is not being made and the actions proposed do not address this problem.
- c. The adoption of the idea of a militarily-enforced no-fly zone as the measure of choice by U.S. Democratic presidential hopefuls, just as even the more militant U.S. activists are recognizing that it is a pointless and reckless action. Lurking behind this is an even more curious logic: because a NFZ will lead to humanitarian crisis (as the GoS closes down international humanitarian operations) it is the responsibility of the U.S. and its allies to resolve the resulting crisis with a ground intervention.
- d. The new leaders in Britain and France both want to have high-profile, low-cost “wins” with respect to their relations with the U.S. and have thought (erroneously) that Darfur provides them with such an opportunity. (This is similar to the way in which senior figures in the George H.W. Bush administration in late 1992 thought that Somalia was an easy option compared to Bosnia.)
- e. Diplomacy between Washington DC and Khartoum is conducted by public signals whose correct interpretation is never guaranteed.

9. The outcome of this is that President Omar al Bashir is increasingly convinced that the U.S. has a regime change agenda and that the UN troops for Darfur are part of that. While such caricatures persist on both sides it is unlikely that there will be serious progress towards a settlement in Darfur, and the future of Sudan will remain hostage to moral posturing among U.S. political aspirants.

## **Darfur's Peace Process**

10. The complications and hindrances foreseen in the relaunched Darfur peace process are materializing. At the root of the impasse are (a) the disorganization of the armed movements and (b) the schemes and strategies of Khartoum and Asmara.

11. The characterization of the Darfur armed movements as “factions” is problematic. What exists are (a) field commanders who control specific localities and who have alliances that are more-or-less strong with their counterparts in adjoining areas and (b) some exiled leaders with a greater or lesser following on the ground. The Arusha invitees are the following:

- a. JEM of Ibrahim Khalil (excluding breakaway groups). In Darfur JEM has no field presence to speak of though it is trying to re-establish itself in South Darfur.
- b. SLM-Abdel Wahid. Abdel Wahid remains the one Darfurian leader who has a wide popular support base. It remains the case that without him no process can move ahead. He has made it clear that he is not cooperating with this one.
- c. SLM-Abdel Shafi. This is a genuine if small group.
- d. SLM-Khamis Abbaker. Khamis continues to represent the Masalit.
- e. SLM-Abdalla Yahya. Abdalla was imposed on the G-19 through a de facto coup. If he does obtain the support of the real commanders in North Darfur (Jar el Nabi Abdel Karim, Suleiman Marajan, etc) then he is a bigger field presence than all the others combined. However it is most unlikely that they will comply, and if they do this will not signal any lasting commitment to Abdalla's leadership. The one figure who could unite this group is Suleiman Jamous and he remains interned in Kadugli, despite efforts to have him freed.
- f. Ibrahim Diraige has no presence on the ground.
- g. NMRD-Khalil Abdalla has a presence on the Chad border but no independence of action.
- h. Salah Abu Sura. While it is a step forward to include an Arab group among the armed groups, Abu Sura has turned out to be much less significant than early indications suggested. The real organizing groups are others, and Abu Sura really represents only himself.

12. The second complication is the stratagem of Khartoum and Asmara to manipulate the process so as to control it. This they have succeeded in doing, specifically through extending recognition to Abdalla Yahya, Diraige and Abu Sura, and excluding the key North Darfur field commanders and Jamous. Abdel Wahid's decision to absent himself is readily dismissed as vain posturing but in reality Abdel Wahid has read the dynamics correctly: the process as currently configured will not lead to a credible peace process, he will be reduced in stature if he joins as just another “faction,” and he is better served remaining out of it.

13. The Challenges of the Darfur Peace Process

14. The Darfur peace process needs to be relevant to today's realities in Darfur, be relevant to Sudan's national dilemmas, and address the western public clamour for something to be done.

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