

# Prospects for Peace in Sudan

## Briefing: August 2007

(focusing on Darfur)

### Overview

1. The hope for securing peace in Sudan lies in a three-set sequence that runs: (a) conclude with the issue of UN troops in Darfur, (b) sustain a credible peace process for Darfur and (c) redirect attention back to the key national issues, namely national unity or separation and the democratization process under the CPA. At present the prospects of achieving (a) and (b) appear good, provided that the ambitions for what both can achieve are limited.
2. The passing of UN Security Council Resolution 1769 means that, in principle, the protracted wrangle over the identity, number and mandate of the international force in Darfur is finally resolved. Now the more important question arises, what is the force actually there to do? The strategic vision of the Force Commander and the relations between the peacekeepers and the political operation in Darfur (and Sudan) are paramount.
3. The opportunity for refocusing on the revived Darfur peace process is timely. However the obstacles to achieving agreement in this process are formidable. The most significant of these is the fragmentation of all forms of authority in Darfur, including among the Arab militia armed by the GoS. The formula of a patched-up DPA, viable twelve months ago, will need to be augmented by a mechanism for ensuring the engagement of a much wider range of Darfurian stakeholders, including other field commanders, Arab tribes leaders, representatives of the IDPs, and civil society organizations. A rapid and successful conclusion to the negotiating process is not in prospect.
4. Reason for optimism is to be located in the preparatory meetings of the Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultation and a number of other local initiatives conducted in Darfur. Alongside the militarization and fragmentation of Darfur's communities there is a convergence on a version of this historic "Darfur consensus" that held the region's ethnic groups together. The complementarity between the revived peace process and the DDDC preparatory work should be underlined.
5. One of the most significant obstacles to achieving progress in Sudan remains the public debate in the U.S., where Darfur has become the focal point of moral posturing by aspiring Democratic presidential candidates. The point at which greater political attention to Darfur has a positive impact on the political process has long-since passed.

## Realities in Darfur

6. On the eve of the final session of the Abuja peace talks, a delegation of elders from Darfur warned the parties that if the DPA failed, then Darfur would see a war of all against all. They foresaw a collapse of confidence in the authority of both the government and the rebels. They advised the latter that a war against the government of the day should not be confused with a war against government (in general). The warning was prescient.

7. The reality in Darfur today has the following major elements:

- a. 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). In the last 12 months, at least half of the violent fatalities have been either GoS soldiers or Arab militiamen. Aerial bombardment is extremely sporadic and has killed perhaps a dozen or so civilians this year. Displacement continues at about 20,000 per month.
- b. 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. The GoS's least-bad option is to continue to stoke local conflict, in order to prevent Arab and non-Arab groups allying against it.
- c. The humanitarian crisis continues but 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.
- 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. The attacks on relief workers have a disproportionate impact on international perceptions of the crisis.
- 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. At the end of July, the fiercest fighting of the year took place northwest of Nyala between two Arab militias (Rizeigat Abbala and Terjam), both of which were armed by the GoS and absorbed into different paramilitary institutions (central reserve and nomadic police and PDF). About a dozen such conflicts currently rage in different parts of Darfur. Alliances are fluid and opportunistic. While the GoS tries to mediate in many of the conflicts it is usually incapable of resolving them and indeed is fearful that a proper resolution will lead to the Arabs becoming part of a Darfur political bloc that

marginalizes the NCP. In the case of the Rizeigat Abbala-Terjam fight the GoS has sent in the army, which may only further complicate the situation. For example it may push one or other of the militias to ally with the SLA against the army.

9. 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 highly variable stature. The word “fragmentation” is often used to describe the rebels. This is not wholly accurate, because the unity that existed in 2003-04 was largely illusory—the SLM and (to a lesser extent) JEM always consisted of locally-formed groups in alliances that came together for specific military or political activities. Most field commanders have a strong sentimental attachment to unity but none of them possesses the material resources or stature to impose unity. Moreover, fragmentation is not confined to the Darfur armed movements: it is a basic socio-political reality across Darfur.

10. The death of Dr Majzoub al Khalifa in a car accident in late June has left Bashir without one of his most capable operators. Majzoub had proved himself sufficiently powerful and organized that he could not be removed from the Darfur file. His approach of “retail politics” (a term named for him personally) had consolidated the NCP’s position in Darfur and squeezed out any serious chances for the kinds of compromises necessary to bring others into the peace agreement. Majzoub’s death creates a gap within the governing clique that will be hard to fill. While his successor may have been ready to demonstrate more flexibility on the peace talks, he may lack the political authority possessed by Majzoub, who had the power to impose concessions on his colleagues when necessary.

### **Khartoum and UNAMID**

11. President Omar al Bashir is clearly in control of Khartoum’s policy on the issue of UN troops in Darfur. For the first time since the 1989 coup he is exercising his constitutional powers over a prolonged period without being overshadowed by a civilian party leader. He is relishing the power. Bashir’s pride is also deeply stung by the insults he received when he was refused the position of President of the AU and (more importantly) the way he has been singled out for public condemnation by the U.S. administration.

12. Bashir’s intransigence on UNAMID can be explained by a combination of his distrust of U.S. motives, his impatience with being continually humiliated, and the unexpected success of his tactic of tying the international community’s attention down on the marginal issue of the identity of Darfur’s peacekeepers. These three considerations are not going to change. Unless there is a major change in the tenor of the rhetoric of the U.S. administration and the opening of a good and confidential channel of communication between Washington DC and Khartoum, Bashir will continue to fear that the U.S. is nurturing an agenda of regime change. Khartoum will also create as many difficulties as

possible for the process of deploying UNAMID, in order to keep foreign capitals preoccupied with this issue.

### **Darfur's Peace Process**

13. More significant is the relaunched Darfur peace process headed by the AU and UN Special Envoys Salim Salim and Jan Eliasson, which is pursuing its roadmap, only marginally behind schedule. The Tripoli meeting to align the different initiatives and the envisioned Arusha meeting can chalk up significant steps forward.

14. The most serious problem the envoys face is obtaining the “right” representation. The choice of who would represent the armed movements was always going to be difficult. It is made more so because of the continuing flux among the leadership of the movements, and the fact that recognition by the AU and UN through participation in Arusha is seen as an important item of political capital by many of the attendees.

15. The Arusha invitees are the following:

- a. SLM-Abdel Wahid. Abdel Wahid remains the one Darfurian leader who has a wide popular support base. Although the depth of his backing is debatable, it remains the case that without him no process can succeed. He has made it clear that he is not cooperating with this one.
- b. JEM-Ibrahim Khalil. In Darfur JEM is much weaker than it was a year ago and has no field presence to speak of since the JEM field commanders in the south and east of Darfur denounced Khalil's leadership and announced a new breakaway group, JEM-Eastern Command. Khalil is attending Arusha and is coordinating his negotiating position with others who are also attending. For him it is a means of reasserting his political relevance.
- c. SLM-Abdalla Yahya. Abdalla was imposed on the G-19 through a de facto coup. He supposedly represents a group of commanders who, between them, comprise a bigger field presence than all the other groups combined. In an attempt to win their support he has named Suleiman Jamous to his team. However the key field commanders—Jar el Nabi Abdel Karim and Suleiman Marajan—have indicated that they will reject Abdalla Yahya if he attends Arusha. The absence of Jar el Nabi and Marajan is a major problem for Arusha.
- d. SLM-Abdel Shafi. Abdel Shafi is attending with three advisors and is coordinating with JEM. Arusha is Abdel Shafi's opportunity to gain international recognition.
- e. SLM-Khamis Abbaker. Khamis continues to represent the Masalit.
- f. SFDA-Ibrahim Diraige has no presence on the ground and sees this as an opportunity for his own political advancement.
- g. NMRD-Khalil Abdalla has a presence on the Chad border but no independence of action from Chad.
- h. Salah Abu Sura. While it is a step forward to include an Arab group among the armed movements, 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. Abu Sura's significance is that he opens the door for other Arab groups to be represented.

16. Now that the relaunched process has gained some credibility we can expect to see a scramble among field commanders to obtain the recognition that goes with participation. More field commanders are likely to emerge with new factional titles demanding a place at the table. It will be tempting to dismiss these groups as opportunistic splinters. However, the reality of power in Darfur means that everyone with a field presence possesses real power. The Special Envoys will face a tricky judgment call concerning when to call a halt to admitting new representatives.

17. Abdel Wahid's decision to absent himself is readily dismissed as vain posturing but in reality Abdel Wahid has read the dynamics correctly: he will be reduced in stature if he joins as just another "faction," and he is better served remaining out of it.

18. A second complication is the stratagem of Khartoum and Asmara to manipulate the process so as to control it. At times agreeing, at times disagreeing on tactics, Khartoum and Asmara concur on a determination not to see Darfur settled under the auspices of the UN and U.S. Khartoum is pursuing its strategy by continuing to try to buy off individuals. Asmara's attempts to control the Darfur armed movements are continuing to fail but it is continuing to try.

### **Broadening the Process**

19. The most hopeful development in Darfur in recent months has been the preparatory consultations conducted prior to the Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultation (DDDC). The unresolved politics of Darfur mean that, for the time being, it is not possible to proceed with the DDDC or even with creating the Preparatory Committee for the DDDC. Setting up either of these institutions would be a recipe for political divisiveness and manipulation and it is better that they are postponed. In the meantime, however, the DDDC preparatory consultations have carved out sufficient autonomous political space in order to be able to function in a significant way.

20. The key findings to emerge from the preparatory process thus far are the following:

- a. People demand and need the opportunity to talk at length, express their grievances and explore their options. It is necessary to create the space for political discussions among Darfurians. Without this, Darfurian politics will be driven underground and will become preoccupied with factionalism, rivalry and armed conspiracy.
- b. There is a widespread sentiment of support for the historic "Darfur consensus" that established the non-threatening hegemony of the Fur and a balance between Arab and non-Arab tribes.

- c. The majority of Darfurian community leaders do not feel politically represented, either by the NCP or by the rebel movements. They consider the armed movements to have been brave but politically incapable, unable to provide solutions for Darfur.
- d. New political leaders are likely to emerge from the IDP camps in due course. For the time being there is strong loyalty to Abdel Wahid.
- e. There are major concerns over the census, the elections, and the administration of the home areas from where IDPs were driven. The electoral process is a major opportunity for enfranchising Darfurians.
- f. Opinions of AMIS and the AU are low, in part because of the lack of communication from the AU. Expectations for UNAMID are unrealistically high.

21. The DDDC preparatory process and the revived peace process are complementary. The logic of the peace process demands that participation be strictly limited. But there is no limit to the number of advisors who can be brought to the margins of the process, and whose advice and opinions can be sought, and who in turn can feel a sense of common ownership of the process.

### **“Saving” Darfur**

22. The American agenda of “saving” Darfur promoted by an ever-growing band of celebrities and presidential hopefuls departs more from the reality of Sudan with every passing month. As a result, 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.

23. 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 also 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.

24. 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 intended for Darfur are part of that. Many within the GoS are pessimistic that *any* agreement can be reached on Darfur while the U.S. appears to keep open the option of military action.

25. America’s Save Darfur campaign has moderated its recommendations in recent months as it has realized that it faces the quiet but powerful opposition of the operational humanitarian agencies. But the damage has been done. If Darfur continues to be the lodestone for American politicians to demonstrate their moral standing and toughness, at no cost to themselves, this situation will not change until after the November 2008 Presidential elections.

26. The AU and UN concur that a public relations effort is needed that can portray Darfur in more accurate terms. However, neither organization is able to conduct that effort itself. When UNSG Ban-Ki Moon dared to say that things had improved in Darfur, he was loudly and repeatedly castigated for having been fooled by Khartoum, being complicit in evil, etc. It will be necessary for public intellectuals, Sudanese and international, with some real familiarity with Sudan to reclaim this space.

27. Next Steps

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