

Sudan: Analysis and Prospects

(focusing on Darfur)

June 2006

Overview

1. The DPA lacks a critical mass of support and will face immense problems of implementation. Darfurians have no trust in any of their political leaders. The Chadian-backed spoilers (including JEM) and those in the GoS who like to play divide-and-rule have the upper hand. The DPA's weaknesses have been exacerbated by serious misrepresentations and by Abdel Wahid Nur's disastrous leadership of the SLM.
2. The GoS has emerged from Abuja and the last month looking good, with the problems in Darfur blamed on the Movements. The security cabal is stalling on implementation. Khartoum's shortcomings need to be brought into focus.
3. Minni Minawi's political infrastructure and constituencies will not be capable of mobilizing sufficient support from among Darfurians to implement the DPA. He urgently needs to improve his human rights record before bad publicity threatens the credibility of the DPA. Minni's best chance is to put together a group of broadly representative Darfurians who can run the institutions set up by the DPA.
4. Abdel Wahid has alienated even his core group of supporters by his refusal to meet with Vice President Salva Kiir. The African Union and its supporters face the choice between inviting the SLM fragments to join the DPA one by one, or fostering some sort of reconciliation process among the various SLM fractions. The latter, though more difficult, is preferable. This may involve putting the power-sharing provisions on a slower implementation track (with Minni's agreement).
5. The DPA's ceasefire plan is workable but needs to be augmented by a plan for long-term security arrangements in Darfur, including a mechanism for the control of arms in the hands of tribal militia.
6. The DPA is not yet understood by most Darfurians. It needs to be presented in such a way that its core concepts stand out in a way that can be understood and readily accepted by Darfurians. At present, the critics of the DPA have every opportunity to air their condemnations, and the supporters are not mobilized.
7. Rapid action is needed to address Darfurians' legitimate fears about the DPA and its implementation. It is especially important to reassure refugees and IDPs that they will return to their homes, and to establish a mechanism for quickly disbursing assistance to displaced and other war-affected households. A Victims' Assistance Fund is a possible means for doing the latter.

Threats to Security in Darfur

8. 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.

9. 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. With the rains due, the Arab nomads will begin moving their herds north, and we could expect fierce Arab-Zaghawa clashes in Northern Darfur.

10. The SLA-Abdel Wahid cannot directly pose any military threat, even if it is drawn into the Chadian ambit. Abdel Wahid has more military strength in the camps than in the field. 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.

11. Demonstrations against the DPA in IDP camps and cities (including Khartoum) have been orchestrated by the Popular Congress, Umma Party, Communist Party and SLM-Abdel Wahid. The PCP, Umma Party and CP see these as a ways of paralyzing both DPA and CPA and bringing down the Government of National Unity. For these reasons they are assisting Abdel Wahid, who sees the demonstrations as an endorsement of his own position.

12. An immediate boost for the credibility of the DPA is needed. The best option is to set up a Victims Assistance Fund for the quick disbursement of grants (in cash and in kind) to displaced families and other victims of the war. This would be a mechanism that allows international donors to get around the legal and political problems associated with funding compensation payments, while meeting the practical need for quick assistance, and the political imperative of tangible benefits from the DPA.

13. 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.

14. 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. They want to see the final destination of the arms control process before they take the first steps. It will without doubt lead to an inadequate GoS plan for disarming the Janjaweed and foot-dragging on implementing the plan.

15. As a matter of urgency, the AU's implementation team should draw up a long-term 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

16. 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. Its approach to implementing the DPA is to take unilateral steps, on its own terms, aiming to create *faits accomplis* and turn the tables on the SLM, which is unable to meet the timetable. Members of the "security cabal" led by Abdel Rahim Hussein, Awad al Jaz and Nafie Ali Nafie argue that the GoS gave away too much in signing the DPA (and hence are opposing UN deployment in Darfur).

17. 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). The NCP is trying 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.

18. 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 only 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). The SPLM has failed to grasp the opportunity of a political partnership with the SLM (which admittedly has not been a forthcoming partner itself).

19. Critics of the DPA and other peace accords in Sudan argue that GoS cannot be trusted and will never honor an agreement. Rather than focusing on Khartoum's honesty or lack thereof, it is more useful to note the extreme power disparity between Khartoum and the central political elites, and the provincial political elites in other parts of Sudan. Until there are provincial power centers able to challenge the center (and Juba may yet emerge as one) then it is inevitable that Khartoum will override any peace agreements with provincial resistance movements as soon as it has the opportunity to do so.

20. 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

21. Minni Minawi's position is precarious, and he himself is pessimistic about his personal and political prospects. The DPA is not popular in Northern Darfur, his base. Minni is realistic and practical, but faces immense obstacles. He is justifiably fearful about taking a role in government without gaining some additional political capital. He fears the GoS which has attacked his forces even after signing the DPA. His own people are still rehearsing reservations about the DPA and some commanders have defected to anti-DPA groups. If Minni is to join the GoNU in good standing, some rapid progress should be made on the issues on which Minni has expressed some reservations.

22. Minni's political base consists 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. Recent Zaghawa politics has been marked by political assassination and Minni fears that he may be a target.

23. Second are the military commanders of the SLA who are tied to him because of shared comradeship during the war and through fear. 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. Minni's coercive apparatus is effective but unsustainable. The NCP may fill these gaps, 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. Commanders from Minni's group are trying to organize a conference which runs the risk of forcing him to withdraw from the DPA.

24. 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 Ahmed Ibrahim) bear the imprint of the Umma critique.

25. Minni's support base is too slender to deliver Darfur. He 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 options are to work with the splinter groups that are lining up to join the DPA, encourage the SLM to hold an all-inclusive conference, and find politically-neutral Darfurian technocrats to nominate for leading positions.

26. Minni's biggest handicap is his human rights record. His forces have continued to detain and abuse political opponents and critics are speaking about "torture for peace". The detention of Suleiman Djamous, who is widely respected across Darfur, is of particular concern. More details about past abuses are emerging every week which, if confirmed and publicized, would be catastrophic for his credibility and therefore the standing of the DPA. Minni needs to clean up his human rights performance immediately and unconditionally.

Abdel Wahid al Nur

27. Abdel Wahid al Nur's snub to Vice President Salva Kiir, when he backtracked on his promise to fly to meet him in Yei on June 2, almost certainly marks the end of his leadership role in the SLM. Over the last 12 months, Abdel Wahid has almost single-handedly dismantled the SLM as a cohesive political organization, by driving away everyone except a hard core of loyal Fur and some diaspora opportunists. He is now in Asmara working closely with JEM.

28. The DPA enjoys much broader support among Abdel Wahid's constituency than in Northern Darfur. The tragedy of Abdel Wahid is that he only articulated his core concerns when it was too late. He trusted his educated advisers to put forward negotiating positions that got him nowhere, and he 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.

29. Abdel Wahid may become the symbol of opposition to both the DPA and CPA. He will be supported by those who wish to see these agreements fail, such as the PCP, Umma and Communists. He is fantasizing about opening a new front in Kordofan and re-opening the eastern front, and may seek to make Asmara his base. As Abdel Wahid can be a humane and articulate spokesman for the grievances of ordinary Sudanese, he may

emerge as 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.

The Fragments

30. Many in Abdel Wahid's core group have now turned against him. But they are not deserting the SLM and they are not abandoning their criticisms of the DPA. Instead what they seek to do is to consult with their people and remain united. They also want to reunite with the various groups that split from Abdel Wahid over the last year, including the "Group of 19" (headed by Jar el Nabi), the "SLA-Unity" and the group headed by Khamis Abbaker. They are in contact with Ibrahim Madibu and the SLM Arabs. Ideally they would like to hold a conference. If this works, then there will at last be a serious political representation for the majority of Darfur's non-Arab peoples. But it will take some time. The leaders of this effort are Babiker Abdalla and Ahmed Abdel Shafi. Their chances of success are unknown.

31. The AU is considering a mechanism that will allow splinter groups to formally join the DPA, though not as full signatories. This is welcome and necessary. However, it runs the risk of promoting further fragmentation and local conflict. For example, if one SLA sector commander "signs up", this may create conflict between him and neighboring sector commanders. Also, some criteria are needed for who can "sign": the GoS is already sending its own people to Addis Ababa to try and "sign up" as "SLM". The AU's likely solution to this problem is only to permit individuals who attended the peace talks as Movement delegates, or who are known to AMIS as Movement commanders, to sign a "Declaration of Commitment."

32. A second and more difficult option is to set up a process of discussion and reconciliation among the SLM factions, allowing them to organize a conference, reunite and become part of the implementation of the DPA. For the time being, an "intermediate leadership for peace" could join the DPA in order to keep its momentum. This would be workable only with the support of Minni Minawi and a decision to postpone the implementation of the power-sharing components of the DPA. There is a danger that such a conference would vote to reject the DPA or demand changes. Minni could minimize this danger by working on an implementation protocol with the GoS that addresses the known concerns of these SLM fragments. Most probably, the AU will use its summit in Banjul, the Gambia, in the first week of July as the deadline for the splinters to organize themselves to formally commit to the DPA.

33. 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. The first task of the DDDC is for Darfurians to endorse the DPA. In the present climate, it is possible that a majority would reject it. (With better public relations, a majority could

be swung in favor.) One option would be to hold the DDDC in stages, beginning with local reconciliation conferences and only slowly working up to a regionwide DDDC.

Next Steps

34. The African Union remains dilatory in implementing the DPA. Remarkably little has been done to set up the essential structures or even to publicize the agreement. Most of the public relations effort has in fact been at the personal initiative of members of the Abuja mediation team. It is late to organize a public relations offensive, but still essential.

35. At the moment there are no trusted political leaders in Darfur. The DPA will stand or fall on what it delivers for ordinary Darfurians.

36. Minni Minawi needs to take some dramatic steps to reassure Darfurians that he is not a warlord and that he will respect human rights.

37. The AU needs to develop some detailed implementation plans for the comprehensive disarmament process.

38. The best immediate step to build the credibility of the DPA would be to establish a quick disbursement Victims' Assistance Fund.

39. A political process should be established to allow the multiple fragments of the SLM to hold discussions and rebuild a political infrastructure, that would enable them to participate fully in the implementation of the DPA.

40. The GoS has escaped censure in the last month, because of its tactical adroitness and the shortcomings of the SLM leaders. It needs to be pressured to fulfill its part of the DPA promptly and fully.

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