

# PROSPECTS FOR PEACE IN SUDAN

## BRIEFING

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### **Introduction**

A partial deal becomes closer; a comprehensive settlement remains as distant as ever. The Sudan Government has played its cards cleverly, but hostility between groups in Khartoum and the strong influence of the security nexus remain serious threats to any peace process. The ‘Sudanese-Sudanese Initiative’ (SSI) is an important tactic that is outflanking the opposition. The election date of 20 October is standing as a deadline for the peace processes: once the elections have been held, President Bashir has a much stronger hand. The next two months may well prove the last chance to achieve a comprehensive peace. The problems remain unchanged: the disunity and lack of strategy among the external players is as significant as the disarray and weakness of the Sudanese parties.

### **Peace Processes: Where they Stand**

The peace process(es) in Sudan are very complicated. There are many different meetings with similar names. This section will try to clarify where each process stands and how they relate to each other. They are taken in order, with the fastest first and the slowest last.

#### *Sudanese-Sudanese Initiative (SSI)*

This is a somewhat confusing initiative, but it is important and dynamic. The initial idea came from Sadiq el Mahdi, who wanted an inclusive conference including the opposition and the government to be held in any location inside or outside Sudan. Subsequently however this idea was taken up by President Bashir, who declared it publicly in his celebrations of 30 June. He has called for a preparatory meeting of all the Sudanese parties that will be held in Khartoum. The NDA rejected this call along with some democratic opposition forces in Khartoum allied to the NDA. The Umma initially joined the NDA in this rejection but subsequently changed its mind and accepted to join the initiative. Other parties agreed with the exception of the DUP, USAP, Front for the Restoration of Democracy (headed by Ghazi Suleiman) and the People’s Congress (headed by Dr Hassan al Turabi). The Government has proceeded and (after two postponements) fixed the date of 21 August to convene the Preparatory Conference, under the chairmanship of Gen. (rtd) Abdel Rahman Suwar al Dahab (which has now been confirmed—see July update). It is scheduled to last one week.

The Government’s intention for the SSI Preparatory Conference is probably that the resolutions adopted will become the Government negotiating position in the Comprehensive Conference under the LEI. I.e. the Government does not wish to attend the LEI Conference

solely as a government or as a single party (the National Congress), but brings with it a wider internal political position for which it will claim some democratic legitimacy, as the SSI.

The Preparatory Conference will enable the Government to prepare more detailed positions on the issues, and present its positions as national ones rather than Congress Party positions. This will enable them to escape the criticism of Turabi that he alone represents the fundamental principles of the Congress Party.

At the SSI, the Umma Party is likely to table the Djibouti Agreement as a starting point. This will be attractive to many in the Government, including the generals, because its clear position on self-determination is attractive to the Southerners aligned with Khartoum.

This means that should the Comprehensive Conference fail to go ahead before the elections in October for the Presidency and legislature, the Government will claim legitimacy to propose the agreed agenda as the manifesto for President Bashir to seek election, and following his election, this can be the national policy on peace and reconciliation. Subsequently this would allow for the formation of a National Reconciliation Government under the newly-elected President Bashir, with government portfolios distributed among the parties that participated in the SSI.

### *Libyan-Egyptian Initiative (LEI)*

According to the Egyptian plan, the Preliminary Meeting for the Comprehensive Conference under the LEI should take place between NDA and Sudan Government in September. The NDA has authorised its Chairman Mulana Mohamed Osman to liaise with Egypt on the venue, time and status of representation, none of which are yet decided. However, it is evident that Mulana does not intend to move on this until after the NDA Convention, scheduled for 6 September.

The intention of the Preliminary Meeting is to determine the agenda, participation and venue of the planned Comprehensive Conference under the LEI. The Comprehensive Conference is intended settle all outstanding political differences between the parties, establish peace, return the opposition to Khartoum and set up a new national government.

From the Government's position, the Preliminary Meeting should wait until the successful conclusion of the Preparatory Conference of the SSI. Thus, Khartoum has delayed the LEI somewhat, inadvertently assisting the NDA strategy, which is also based on delay (for now). The Egyptian Government however will want to fix a date for the Preliminary Meeting, probably at short notice as soon as the opportunity arises, probably in mid-September. Egypt may be ready for further small delays, out of diplomatic sensibilities towards Kenya and the IPF countries, but it is very unlikely that Egypt will take or support any moves towards the merger of the LEI and IGAD.

### *IGAD*

IGAD is making painfully slow progress. But there is still, remarkably, a consensus among Sudanese civil society and opposition that the IGAD Declaration of Principles and forum represent the best foundation for a comprehensive settlement. This was evidenced by the strong agreement on this issue by the NDA representatives and civil society groups (from Khartoum as well as outside) meeting at the 'Civil Project' conference in Kampala in late July.

The NDA Peace Secretariat delegation arrived in Nairobi on 10 August intending to consult with Ambassador Daniel Mboya on options for the merger of IGAD and the LEI. No

formal written request for the NDA to join IGAD has yet been submitted. A Sudanese presidential envoy, Qutbi Mahdi, arrived at the same time. It appears he had the task of communicating a message to President Moi, to the effect that Mboya should not meet the NDA delegation. Khartoum's manoeuvre plays into the hands of Kenyan preferences for keeping IGAD as a GoS-SPLA forum, not 'complicating' the issue of Sudan by involving the northern parties, nor indeed Egypt. No NDA-IGAD meeting has taken place, and it seems very unlikely that any will occur. The NDA delegation has to be content with meeting with envoys of the other IGAD countries. This rebuff is very unfortunate.

The NDA leadership is coming to believe that it will be necessary for Presidents Moi and Mubarak to hold a summit in order for progress on merging IGAD and the LEI to occur. Unfortunately, both Presidents have many reasons for not meeting quickly, and many reasons for not agreeing on a single unified initiative.

The next round of IGAD was scheduled for 21 August. Khartoum proposed 3 September as an alternative date, to follow its Preparatory Conference. In the wake of the de facto Kenyan rebuff to the NDA, the prospects for IGAD are not encouraging. Even if progress is made between the SPLA and GoS on substantial issues, the absence of the NDA rules out IGAD as a forum for a comprehensive settlement. Meanwhile, the Egyptians will intensify their pressure on the NDA Chairman to attend the Preliminary Meeting of the LEI, and will push for this to be scheduled as quickly as possible after the NDA Convention in early September.

The deadline for substantial progress to be made by IGAD, imposed by the IPF at its Oslo meeting in June, runs out in September. The question is, what alternative do IPF members have in mind should IGAD not succeed?

### *NDA National Convention*

Initially scheduled for 26 August in Asmara, this is now likely to be held on 6 September or very shortly thereafter. The challenge facing the NDA is that the Convention should act as a preparatory conference for the LEI and/or IGAD. The NDA Chairman faces a dilemma on this. On the one hand, the recent experience, in which Mulana Mohamed Osman al Mirgani is personally mandated to negotiate, has placed extreme pressure on Mulana himself. On the other hand, if the issue is opened up to debate and decision at the NDA Convention, then it is possible that a new negotiating committee may be formed that could include radical elements in the NDA opposed to making peace at this time.

One of the fractious issues at the NDA Convention is likely to be finance. The NDA is inviting each party to send a delegation of six, but is only paying for one.

### *Elections*

The national elections scheduled for 20 October are the real deadline for IGAD and the LEI. President Bashir has said that postponement is a possibility only in exceptional circumstances. Bashir is frightened that postponement would allow Turabi to become stronger. However, it is equally clear that postponement may be necessary to give time for a comprehensive settlement.

Before the elections, the National Congress must meet and re-nominate Bashir as its candidate. The convention is scheduled for September and postponement is unlikely. The nomination of Bashir is a foregone conclusion. But the party is not in good shape. Its acting

Secretary General, Ibrahim Ahmed Omer, has been publicly much more conciliatory to Turabi than Bashir has been. Holding the party together is going to be a challenge.

A third Islamic party is also organising. Known as the Islamic Entity Movement ('Harakat al Kayan al Islami'), this initially sprang from attempts to reconcile Bashir and Turabi (hence the suffix it often uses, 'The Reconciliation Group'). It is headed by Sheikh Sadiq Karuri and has a membership including many prominent former NIF cadres and intellectuals.

There are indications that the Government is also planning a clever move to outsmart the NDA at the time of the elections. The NDA identified certain security clauses in the constitution as needing to be nullified in order to create a 'conducive atmosphere' for negotiation. Instead of the Government being seen to nullify these clauses outright (which would be a climbdown), the plan would be that the National Congress tables the relevant amendments for referendum at the same time as the national elections. Assuming votes go according to plan, then the government can claim to have met all the major preconditions set by the NDA for a 'conducive atmosphere'. Moreover they can claim that a new era has begun, and the onus is on the opposition to respond.

Many in the opposition and the international community will be tempted to dismiss the elections as a gimmick and to argue that nothing substantively has changed: that the same overall options for peace remain. In an important sense they will be right: the elections cannot be considered truly democratic, and Sudan will still need a comprehensive peace deal. However, the realities of politics in Northern Sudan mean that a successful election in October will leave President Bashir strengthened. The IGAD Heads of States Summit is now scheduled for late November in Khartoum: this will be seen as international blessing for President Bashir. For many in the region, the Arab world, and increasingly the international community, the options will no longer be whether to support the opposition or advocate peace, but whether to support the government or advocate peace.

## **Militarisation in Khartoum**

Recent developments have once again highlighted the military-security factor, and its potentially destabilising implications.

### *The Fighting in Bahr el Ghazal*

July and early August have witnessed a significant escalation in fighting, especially in Bahr el Ghazal and Blue Nile. The SPLA, which initiated the fighting in Gogrial has been doing well. The Government has responded with an intense round of bombing raids, some of which appear to have been intended to hit or at least frighten UN and NGO aircraft in the South. There are also some indications of a crackdown inside Aweil and Wau, which, if confirmed, would be disturbing in terms of human rights. The Government's violation of the OLS agreement was sufficiently serious for the matter to be brought before the UN Security Council on 11 August.

On the side of the SPLA, one of the most significant aspects to the fighting is that it indicates how comfortable the SPLA leadership remains with the military option. The language of confrontation and war, unchanged from the early and mid-1990s, has continued.

While continued intense fighting in Bahr el Ghazal is a likely option, the possibility of the SPLA shifting the offensive to Juba cannot be ruled out. The relocation of SPLA forces

away from Equatoria has provided an opening for the Lord's Resistance Army to infiltrate into northern Uganda once again after a period during which it was largely confined to Juba.

The renewed conflict in Bahr el Ghazal raises the spectre of renewed famine there in 2000/01. Undoubtedly, after the experience of 1998, the UN and donors will be vigilant in monitoring any signs of impending disaster. However, there is a possibility of renewed humanitarian crisis, with attendant political implications. For example, any western governments that pressure the parties to attend peace talks in the middle of a famine are likely to be accused of moral blackmail, and playing politics with the starving.

### *The Security Nexus in Khartoum*

The situation on the side of the Government is more complex. Undoubtedly there is an increased influence of the generals in Khartoum. The promotion of the loyal NIF soldiers, Bakri Hassan Saleh and El Hadi Abdalla, to the Ministries of Defence and Interior, was a sign of the ascendancy of the military-security nexus. The new ministers need to prove their credentials with some victories on the battlefield. They appear to have also won some victories within the Government, to the extent that Foreign Minister Mustafa Ismail was obliged to echo their militant rhetoric in public statements.

The security nexus is an important group, many of whom were instrumental both in the 1989 coup and in the December move against Turabi. As well as Bakri and el Hadi, significant members include Ibrahim Shams el Din, Nafie Ali Nafie, Qutbi Mahdi and el Fatih Erwa (currently ambassador to the UN). The group is solidly against Turabi, but its ongoing support for Bashir and Ali Osman may be conditional on continued strong support for the military and other requirements.

The militarisation of the Government is primarily a response to internal contradictions in Khartoum, specifically fear of the continuing power of Hassan al Turabi, who remains the number one threat to President Bashir. The SPLA offensive in Bahr el Ghazal played its part, but it may also have been no more than the pretext that the security nexus was seeking to assert itself.

Turabi's taunts that the army was incapable of winning the war have been very provocative. Turabi has also declared that the war can no longer be considered a *jihad*, and has pointedly referred to the contributions made over the years by the Islamists to the war effort, including their major financial assistance and the large number of volunteer *mujahideen* recruited from the youth and students. The army's recruitment base seems to be suffering as a direct consequence. It is notable that on 9 August, President Bashir bade farewell to a batch of students destined to join a mujahideen unit in the South, but that the batch was only 250 students—far smaller than would have been the case if Turabi had been active in mobilisation. Pro-Turabi students taunted and insulted the conscripts as they paraded.

In this context, the progress made within the SSI, especially the inclusion of the Umma Party and pro-Khartoum Southern groups, takes on a different colour. The generals expect that, whatever success is achieved in the SSI or LEI, the SPLA will continue to fight. They therefore need to prepare a new recruitment base for the army to replace the militant Islamic youth. Two important constituencies become more readily available if the SSI succeeds, namely the Ansar supporters of the Umma Party and the Southerners aligned against the SPLA.

This scenario illustrates the alarming but real possibility that a partial peace deal under the SSI and/or LEI could actually lead to an escalation of the war in the South.

### *What will the Security Nexus Do?*

The power and determination of the security nexus within Khartoum should not be underestimated. Since the fragmentation of the civilian Islamists, this group is the most cohesive and ruthless force remaining. There can be little doubt that they are dismayed by the military setbacks and by the evident aimlessness and lack of commitment by the government. Presumably, their aim is that, following the elections, they will consolidate their grip on key ministries and on the army and security services, confining liberalisation to a restricted sphere. However, other scenarios cannot be ruled out. For example, if the elections are to be postponed—which is the logical demand of those most interested in a comprehensive settlement—this could be the opportunity for the security officers to take exceptional measures and halt the peace and liberalisation process entirely. Alternatively, the classic pretext for a security power bid is the claim that the army is demoralised and lacking clear political leadership. The combination of poor military readiness in the South and lack of governmental resolve to face down Turabi is the ideal opportunity for the security nexus to take its chance. Other pretexts, such as promoting reconciliation, cannot be ruled out either.

### **Scenarios**

The most likely scenario is that neither the LEI nor IGAD make substantive progress before the October elections. This will mean that President Bashir emerges from the elections with a new mandate, including the partial settlement achieved at the SSI, his electoral credentials, ministerial portfolios given to non-Congress Party members, a parliament with some opposition members, and constitutional amendments that (on paper) satisfy the NDA demands. Bashir will then be in a much stronger position to determine the pace and substance of future negotiations under the LEI and will be under less pressure to make concessions at IGAD.

A less likely scenario is that the LEI succeeds, at least in achieving sufficient progress to force the Government to postpone the October elections. The Egyptian Government is putting intense pressure on both President Bashir and the NDA for substantial progress during September. But the LEI is hampered by the disarray in the NDA, the lack of support for it from the U.S. and other IPF members, and distrust of Egypt's motives by most Sudanese parties.

The conditions for IGAD to succeed remain extremely remote. The likelihood of a Moi-Mubarak summit on Sudan is slender. The SPLA has not displayed the energy or commitment that give rise for optimism about NDA involvement or substantive progress in talks. Kenya remains unconvinced of the need to include the NDA and Egypt. If, as is likely, IGAD fails to give a clear welcome to the NDA request, then it is likely that the long-feared split between the SPLA and the northern NDA parties will finally take place.

At the Oslo meeting of the IPF in June, the western donors gave IGAD a deadline: progress by mid-September. But this threat was not backed by an explicit warning: 'or else option X.' While the U.S. and other IGAD partners have been brainstorming about a 'third option' or a 'Dayton-type' peace process for a year or so, time has now become extremely short to actually prepare for what may be needed. Any such 'Option X' would have to be implemented in a very short window of time, between the evident failure of IGAD (mid-September at the earliest, although its final spasms could be dragged out for longer) and the October elections (which could, under exceptional pressure, be delayed).