

Sudan: Analysis and Prospects

(focusing on Darfur)

September 2006

Overview

1. Since the beginning of the Darfur crisis, the GoS strategy has been to foment division and confusion, on the premise that Khartoum is more adept than any other player in surviving, even thriving, on disorder. As the crisis has unfolded, in the context of a chaotic rebel movement, the GoS has often needed only a light steer in order to pursue this aim. Today, the GoS has succeeded in sucking most of the major players into becoming part of the problem in Darfur. The AU has become victim to this. The U.S. and UN are in danger of becoming so too.
2. The NCP has reviewed Sudanese-U.S. relations, concluding that normalization of relations with the U.S. is impossible because the U.S. has an insatiable appetite for Sudanese reform that can only be met with regime change.
3. Implementation of the DPA remains stalled while the GoS tries to reconfigure the DPA as a security pact with the SLA-Minawi. With every passing week, the credibility of Minawi is further jeopardized.
4. In deciding to expel JEM and SLA-AW from the Ceasefire Commission and Joint Commission, the AU Special Representative made the AU into a party to the conflict. AMIS is now facing the consequences of that. It is possible that a quick change in AU leadership could retrieve the situation.
5. The reform of the SLA-AW/Abdel Shafi is proceeding but the faction continues to be hampered by weak structures and uncertain leadership. A rapid declaration of support for the DPA is most unlikely, but the group can certainly be coaxed into a positive engagement with processes of peace and stabilization. The position of the G19/SLA-Unity is crucial to the future of Darfur. The leaders of this faction have shown poor political judgement and have made major errors, but it would compound the error to ostracize them or punish them for their attacks on the AU.
6. The Darfur Darfur Dialogue and Consultation is poised to move ahead. This demands capable leadership. The DDDC has the potential to rescue the peace process but will need to take a step back to reflect on the shortcomings of the process thus far if it is to proceed effectively.
7. The most likely immediate scenario is a last-ditch attempt by the GoS to create a military fait accompli. An incoming UN force will face a situation in which it runs a serious risk of following the AU in being sucked into the crisis.

Disorder as Political Instrument

8. Khartoum can survive with protracted disorder in the peripheries. No provincial insurrection in Sudan, including that of the SPLA, has ever threatened central government unless there has been significant military involvement by a neighboring state—and Sudan's strategic depth means that only a coalition of neighbors that includes Egypt, Ethiopia and Eritrea can pose a real threat to the center. The simplest response to any emergent threat in the provinces is to create internecine strife and chaos, which is normally not difficult to do because of the fragmentary nature of any rebellions. What the government cannot survive is losing crucial allies within the ruling coalition itself. A rule of thumb for any Sudanese government is that apparently irrational behavior in Khartoum arises from an internal power struggle within the regime itself.

9. Much of the apparent sinister Machiavellianism of the Khartoum government comes from its internal fractiousness. At no time is any one faction of the government in complete mastery of the situation. The internal coalition is perpetually like a two-legged stool, seeking a third pillar of support. The current dominant alliance between the security cabal and the "old guard" in the NCP is both insufficiently consolidated and lacks a third partner—the SPLA is not sufficiently active to stabilize the government and the PCP is in opposition. Everything is negotiable, giving Sudanese politics the characteristics of permanent flux at the center. While the central configuration may alter, the indeterminacy will not change.

10. With disorder and flux permanent features of the political landscape, it becomes extremely hard to pursue policy goals.

Khartoum's Calculations

11. What is Khartoum's calculation in its current strategy for relations with the U.S.? During the second quarter of 2006, the NCP conducted an internal review of its relations with the U.S. and some of the conclusions of that review are now becoming evident.

12. The NCP's main conclusion is that it can do nothing to assuage the demands of the U.S. government. It is well aware of how policy is made in Washington (in earlier years, the GoS was adept at playing Treasury off against State, and it worked with the Israeli lobby over the Ethiopian Jews, etc.). Its conclusions are, reportedly, that (a) the Democrats are more hawkish on Sudan than the Republicans, (b) the domestic U.S. interest groups are sufficiently bipartisan and deeply-rooted that they will not change their positions, and (c) if the GoS meets one set of demands, the U.S. will come with another, stronger set. Many in the NCP believe that the U.S. wants regime change and some also believe that the U.S. favors an independent Southern Sudan. This review represents a setback for Ali Osman Taha, who argued that it was possible to normalize relations with the U.S.

13. The implication of this review is that the NCP and security leadership is holding out against UN troops in Darfur in part because they see a UN force as a Trojan Horse, a means of smuggling in a set of secret (or not-so-secret) agendas for the future.

14. The GoS also calculates that it can survive international isolation and sanctions. The GoS financial system emerged, by evolution and design, to take account of three pervasive realities. First, since about 1984, Sudan has been unable to pay its debts. Its international financial strategy was described as early as 1985 as “managing the unmanageable.” It has developed expertise in this. Second, the largest source of hard currency was (until oil revenues came on stream) remittances from the Sudanese diaspora in the Arab states, channelled through informal transfer systems. State-based financial mechanisms for capturing these funds have never been established, but various private Islamic financial houses and charities have become powerful intermediaries. Third, after 1989-90, Sudan was under a tough regime of international financial sanctions, which has left its rulers extremely adept at not only evading the direct impact of those sanctions, but actually profiting from them. Two additional considerations have made the GoS more confident: fourth, it has oil and fifth, Chinese influence is growing year by year.

15. In principle, targeted sanctions aimed at individuals are a fine idea. In practice, this will be exceptionally difficult to implement. The targets of the sanctions have many years of experience in evading sanctions.

16. One of the myths dearly-held by the Darfur lobbies in the U.S. is that international (especially American) pressure and sanctions made the difference in reforming Sudanese policy in the late 1990s. In fact, by far the greater pressure on Khartoum came from the military alliance of Eritrea, Ethiopia and Uganda, which with a tacit green light from Egypt positioned very substantial military forces on Sudanese territory and captured important towns. These governments (especially the most influential one, Ethiopia) were discreet about their military involvement in Sudan, so their role has not been given full credit in the public record. The U.S. role in the years 1995-98 was very largely to give diplomatic cover to this regional strategy. A raft of sanctions from the UN and U.S. had modest impact. Note that this occurred before oil exports began. This historical fact is important because it strongly influences security strategy in Khartoum. The generals calculate that provided that they do not face hostile neighbors, they can withstand U.S. and UN pressure. Hence their priority is securing their borders and getting friendly neighbors.

17. The GoS is investing heavily in the friendly neighbors strategy. In recent weeks its relationships with Uganda, Eritrea and Chad have improved markedly.

18. The detention of journalists in Darfur is probably a gambit so that Khartoum has some cards to play in the political bargaining of the next month.

Implementation of the DPA

19. The GoS is in violation of the DPA by reinforcing its troops in Darfur and mounting offensives against non-signatory groups.

20. The GoS plan of action for Darfur is tantamount to turning the DPA into a defense pact. Having won a political victory in Chad and reduced the rear base for the JEM-NRF, Khartoum is preparing to create a military fait accompli.

21. The Darfur Joint Assessment Mission is proceeding. Nothing else is happening.

Crisis in the AU

22. The AU has allowed itself to be sucked into the Darfur crisis, becoming a problem rather than a solution. The main reason for this has simply been lack of competence and capability. The AU's vulnerabilities have been skilfully exploited by the GoS, which has seized on every opportunity to press its agenda. The GoS also knows the personal pressure points on the senior AU personnel.

23. One of the persistent weaknesses of the AU has been its propensity to issue threats that it cannot carry out. The Abuja process was marked by regular banging of the table and exhortations to the parties to speed up or face the consequences. In the final days and in PSC meetings thereafter, the AU made some vague and some specific threats against non-signatories and those undermining the agreement. Those threats continue, especially after ambushes in which non-signatories have attacked AMIS and killed AMIS personnel. At no time has AMIS been in a position to carry out its threats. Its only action has been to rhetorically condemn non-signatories and to expel them from its institutions. This is an approach born of frustration and has made all the parties consider the AU with contempt. At present, AMIS is virtually in a state of hostilities with the non-signatory groups, especially JEM and SLA-Unity.

24. The September departure of Baba Gana Kingibe, the AU's Special Representative, is an opportunity for the AU to move forward. Kingibe's failures are too well-known to need repeating. The immediate challenge is his replacement. Several names have been canvassed. The first and most obvious option is Sam Ibok, who is knowledgeable and capable. But his rocky personal relations with his AU superiors may mean that he is blocked. Ibok will continue as head of the implementation team. Other candidates mentioned include Ablasse Oudragou, the Malian former minister who nominally chaired the Wealth Sharing Commission in Abuja (he would be a poor choice) and General Lazarus Sumbeiywo (an excellent choice that would have to be pushed through against Khartoum's objections). Abdul Mohammed has also been mentioned as a candidate in case Ibok does not go forward. Abdul would need a strong secretariat.

Reform of the Non-Signatory SLA Groups

25. The SLA-Abdel Wahid is much better off without Abdel Wahid. Yet not all of its failures can be pinned at its former leader's door. Ahmed Abdel Shafi and his colleagues are plagued by division and indecisiveness, with each commander and leader acting as a

power base unto himself. They continue to put forward multiple contradictory proposals for their next steps, and could easily spend weeks or months arguing over minor procedural issues.

26. We should not expect the SLA-Abdel Shafi and the SLA-Unity to come out in support of the DPA quickly. They are likely to express support for the ceasefire and much of the security arrangements package, but will continue to demand that key aspects of the DPA be revisited. They will ask for a supplementary agreement or a renegotiation of some aspects. Some in the group will even want to revisit central issues such as the Vice Presidency or the Region. Most likely, the senior leadership can be persuaded to settle for an “implementation protocol” that addresses their outstanding concerns. Should there be additional money in the Compensation Fund, a clear commitment to SLA involvement in monitoring the disarmament of the Janjaweed, and some agreement on posts within the TDRA institutions, it is likely that the SLA-AS and SLA-Unity will come onside in the next two months or so.

27. The SLA-Unity group has been poorly led. However, it is not guilty of some of the offenses laid at its door. For example, it appears that it was not responsible for the attack on AMIS and the killing of two Rwandese. GoS military actions against the SLA-Unity and AU condemnations of it will make it difficult for the SLA-Unity to participate in a reformed SLA. The absence of Jar el Nabi, Marajan and Adam Bakheit would weaken any reformed SLA and restrict its influence to Jebel Marra and the IDP camps.

28. Various individuals and fractions remain outside any process at all. Among them are Ali Adam Shogar and Sharif Harir.

Darfur Darfur Dialogue and Consultation

29. The DDDC has the potential to revive a credible peace process. The position of chairperson of the Preparatory Committee has been offered to Abdul Mohammed, who has put certain conditions on his acceptance. Prominent among these are the request that he have a large degree of autonomy, that he include international partners and civil society organizations in the Preparatory Committee, and that he have sufficient time to make it a credible process.

30. If the DDDC is to work, it must avoid—and be seen to avoid—the problems that damaged the DPA. Two aspects are essential. One is that it must be inclusive: all parties and stakeholders must be involved. This means that the non-signatory parties must be involved. If they cannot be engaged within Darfur (as would be the case for JEM, for example) then they should be engaged internationally. This is a difficult precondition for many to accept, but without it, the DDDC will not work. The second is that the process must not be bound by artificial deadlines. It must have enough time for all issues to be discussed and all groups to feel properly involved and consulted. This is also not an easy precondition to satisfy, but it is also essential.

31. The DDDC will be hampered by Kingibe's decision, taken with little consultation, to invite General Abdel Rahman Suwar al Dahab to chair the DDDC. Suwar al Dahab was Nimeiri's Chief of Staff who took power in 1985 and presided over the elections one year later. He was also the man who took the decision to arm the Darfur and Kordofan Baggara Arab militias against the SPLA. He is an Islamist. The GoS will be very happy with Suwar al Dahab but he will be rejected as a non-neutral figure by the SLA and most Darfurians.

Scenarios

32. The entry of a UN force, should it be achieved, runs the risk that it will change little. It took two years for AMIS to decline from being a welcome force to its current, demoralized and discredited situation. The expectations of the UN are unrealistically high and it is quite possible that it will follow the same trajectory. Certainly, the GoS will have every reason to undermine and compromise a UN force and suck it into the conflict.

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