

PROSPECTS FOR PEACE IN SUDAN

BRIEFING

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Overview

1. Sudan is at the brink of peace and in the depths of war. The internal repercussions of the war in Darfur are proving far more destabilising than the GoS had anticipated. This instability interacts with international condemnation, which is increasingly vociferous. The IGAD peace process is in the balance, still not at a successful conclusion. The conflict in Darfur has thrown the GoS peace efforts into confusion, dividing its political and diplomatic energies. Fearing the hand of Hassan al Turabi and his Popular Congress party in both the Darfur insurrection and a suspected military putsch, the GoS has moved sharply against the Turabi wing of the Islamist movement.
2. The Darfur conflict has received a high level of international attention, and there have been rapid moves towards establishing a credible mechanism for mediation. A very positive sign is that the international consensus that underpinned the establishment of IGAD as an effective peace process, is already in place in support of the Chadian efforts to mediate the Darfur war. However, the necessary energy and political creativity needed to resolve the Darfur issue may divert energy from the IGAD process while also introducing new complications. Meanwhile, the parties themselves are a long way from initiating a credible process of political dialogue.
3. The IGAD process is only inching forwards. While the issues of Abyei and power sharing have been resolved, the questions of the status of Khartoum, and (implicitly) the implementation of the security arrangements remain outstanding. The main actors are shuttling in and out of Naivasha, their attention distracted.

Darfur

4. The war in Darfur threatens to paralyse and fragment the GoS. The conflict reaches into the heart of the GoS power structure and the wider socio-political consensus of northern Sudan in a more destabilising way than the war in the South ever did. If the Darfur conflict is not resolved rapidly and decisively, the GoS may become incapable of governing. This would benefit nobody. But the ruthlessness with which the security elite at the heart of the GoS have operated, and their readiness to turn Darfur into an ethics-free zone, mean that Sudan's future stability rests on the political exclusion or containment of key members of this security elite.

5. The Darfur conflict is irrevocably internationalised. Despite the best efforts of the GoS to argue that it is an internal or at best a regional affair, it cannot any longer rebuff international engagement. The GoS strategy of a rapid all-out offensive in January-February, intended to defeat the rebels and present a *fait accompli* to the international community, has completely backfired. Rather than dividing the international community, the GoS has further united it in horror at what is going on. The fact that France played a key role in initiating the international mediation efforts means that the GoS has little chance of playing off the U.S. against Europe. The African Union has been playing a leading role in the Ndjamenan negotiations, showing for the first time the seriousness of the AU on peace and security issues, subsequent to the establishment of its Peace and Security Council earlier in the year.

6. Even more seriously, the level of outrage among all social and political classes in northern Sudan has surpassed anything witnessed during 21 years of war with the South. The Darfur conflict hits all the most sensitive points of the government. It divides the Islamist movement, it pits the riverain elites in government against the westerners, and it challenges the unity of the armed forces. In this situation, the GoS is in serious danger of disintegration, and must seek additional sources of political support. The logical source for stabilising the GoS leadership is the SPLA, if it were able to accelerate the IGAD peace process and bring the SPLA into government. The National Congress Party leadership indeed made an opening in this direction. However, the GoS appears unwilling to make the sorts of rapid concessions required to bring the Naivasha talks to a successful conclusion, and of course the SPLA's interest in stabilising the GoS is limited. The SPLA rebuffed the NCP opening.

7. Numerous stories of atrocities including massacres, rape, burning of villages and bombing of civilian targets are emerging. Most disturbingly, these atrocities do not appear to have been confined to the period of the GoS offensive of January-February, but have been continuing subsequently. The janjawid militia are implicated heavily, but the air force has also been attacking civilian targets. There are growing problems of hunger, thirst and serious risks of epidemic disease, particularly among the 130,000 refugees and up to 700,000 internally displaced. Darfurians famed ability to withstand hardship will not be enough to prevent a major humanitarian catastrophe, especially if the crisis is prolonged into the rainy season, so that people cannot cultivate, and humanitarian access becomes all-but-impossible because of the lack of roads.

8. The co-incidence that this disaster hit the headlines on the 10th anniversary of the launch of the genocide in Rwanda has contributed to a very high international profile, which has even included a call to consider military intervention from the UN Secretary General. The GoS has shown its ugliest international face, including outright denials and obstruction. It does not appear to have learned the lesson that such stonewalling carries no credibility and gains it no friends.

9. After some delay, peace talks were set in motion in Ndjamenan, Chad. Obtaining agreement will be a major challenge, as neither side is properly prepared. The military successes and international profile of the SLA and JEM have outrun their political capacities. Their political inexperience was shown in the previous aborted round of talks, and they need to do considerable political work before they can present substantive and workable demands. Meanwhile the GoS does not appear to have a clear and united position. For some in Khartoum, the priority is neutralising Hassan al Turabi. For others, it is preventing any further progress on a Darfurian agenda of regional autonomy, for fear that this would

represent a slippery slope. Some in the army are still determined on revenge after last year's military humiliation at el Fashir.

10. Given these factors, political agreement in Ndjamena is unlikely. Consequently the priority topic has been a ceasefire and humanitarian access. Agreements have been signed on these, but the test of these agreements is in their implementation. Other important topics include human rights monitoring and the return of refugees and IDPs to their homes, preferably before the beginning of the planting season in May/June. Hopefully, if these items can be agreed, and the janjawiid reined in, then the violence can be halted and a degree of normality can return, while political negotiations continue. At the time of writing, the talks have again been suspended, with no date set for resumption.

11. The IGAD peace talks were based on an ad hoc multilateralism, with a range of different governments and international organisations playing different roles, but all agreed on the basic framework. The same principle should apply to Darfur. It is an opportunity to involve (for example) the European Union. Thus far, this is occurring. However, a common negotiating stand by the international mediators is complicated by the resurgence of the anti-Khartoum lobbies in Washington. Having been kept at bay during the IGAD negotiations, this lobby group has seized its chance with the atrocities in Darfur. While criticism of the GoS human rights record is amply justified, the major concern for governments must be with the outcome of the process. Given that destroying the government in Khartoum is not in prospect, a strategy of engagement to complement the criticism must be followed. However, such an approach is possible only when the GoS has converged on an internally agreed position.

Ramifications of the Darfur War

12. The implications of the Darfur war for the stability of the GoS are becoming apparent. Many middle-ranking and senior army officers hail from Darfur. Reportedly, a number of senior air force officers refused to bomb civilian targets in Darfur, leading to fears of a widespread refusal to obey orders or worse. There is also discontent among army officers about the use of the janjawiid militia. The levels of disquiet in the army over Darfur should not be underestimated.

13. The GoS continues to see the Darfur rebellion largely through the lens of its own intra-Islamist dispute. This has contributed to the arrest and detention of Hassan al Turabi and the closure of the PCP. These actions are unlikely to have the desired effect. While Turabi's potential for destabilising any political process can never be underestimated, his control over events in Darfur is minimal at best.

14. A key political issue is the responsibility for the janjawiid militia and the implications of the resort to a militia strategy in northern Sudan. Back in February 1989, concerns about the way in which senior Umma Party leaders were supporting the establishment of powerful and well-armed militias in western Sudan made the army command extremely nervous, and contributed to a memorandum to Prime Minister Sadiq el Mahdi demanding an end to the war. Similar fears are being expressed about the prominence of the militia today. The militia strategy is also leading to divisions among the traditional leadership of the Arab tribes of western Sudan. Leading families are opposed to the militia. One of the consistent complaints of Darfurians, Arab and non-Arab alike, is that the central government fails to understand

Darfur, paying insufficient attention to both its economic development and its social complexities.

15. The prominence of the janjawiid shows the limitations of the Islamic extremism lens for analysing northern Sudan. One of the progenitors of the militia was the Islamic Brigade stationed in Libya and supported by Col. Ghaddafi in the 1970s and '80s, some of whose members returned to Sudan in 1985-6. Despite the name, the Libyan-sponsored brigade was in fact an Arab supremacist organisation, and it was not long before some of its members were instrumental in creating the armed wing of the Arab Alliance in Darfur. Meanwhile, those in Khartoum who are responsible for the design and implementation of the current Darfur campaign, are the security elite who have both Islamist and Arab racist colouring, but who are primarily motivated by power seeking and contempt for human rights.

Naivasha

YOANES YOU WILL NEED TO FILL THIS SECTION OUT

16. The peace talks in Naivasha have continued and have met with some success.

17. Abyei proposal: referendum. This is to be welcomed. Key details of the referendum have also been addressed, including its timing (shortly before the South votes on self-determination) and voter eligibility (the nine sections of the Ngok Dinka—a formula that will prevent any attempts to pack the electoral roll with recent immigrants).

18. Nuba Mountains and Southern Blue Nile

19. Power sharing

20. Still to be addressed: the status of Khartoum

21. An underlying issue that will emerge in the future: implementation of the security arrangements

Accountability

22. The issue of accountability for human rights abuses has received new attention, both from the demand of Sudanese civil society (which released a statement on the issue on 29 March), and from the international focus on atrocities in Darfur. This agenda will not go away, and is reinforced by the evident way in which senior GoS figures revert to policies of extreme brutality. The war in Darfur compels diplomats and human rights activists to ask, who is responsible for this policy? Suspicion falls upon the clique of senior security officers who have, over the years, presided over serious abuses in Juba, the Nuba Mountains and the oil fields, and on those who have been most closely associated with the militia strategies in Kordofan and Darfur, reaching back as far as the early years of the war in the 1980s.

23. The Darfur conflict underlines the simple reality that many of those most responsible for egregious abuses of human rights during the war, cannot be permitted to remain in government.

The Region

24. The conflict in Ethiopia's Gambella region appears to have quietened somewhat. The Ethiopian Parliament has set up an investigation into the incidents, and the Ministry of Federal Affairs sent a high-level delegation to see if it can resolve the problem. Any solution will need to address a range of issues including the powers of the regional government, civil rights for people who are Ethiopian citizens but not from groups indigenous to the area, and an equitable solution to land conflicts between indigenous Anuak people, and settlers from the highlands who are encroaching on lowland areas traditionally owned by the Anuak and Nuer.

25. Most of the solution to the Gambella conflict must come from within Ethiopia. However, the Sudanese dimension must not be ignored. The substantial number of Nuer in the region who originate from Sudan is a potential flashpoint. The GoS has despatched militia to the area to stir up problems, hoping perhaps to create antagonism between the Ethiopian Government and the SPLA. So far this tactic has not succeeded.

26. The conflict in the north of Uganda shows no sign of decreasing. The government has been using aircraft to attack suspected LRA positions. More than a million people are displaced. In a notable change in tack, European governments including Britain have called for a political solution, switching from their former position which was to regard the LRA simply as a terrorist organisation and support the Ugandan government's military strategy. The African Union has also become involved in seeking a solution to the conflict.

27. Eritrea remains in political stasis, in frozen confrontation with both Ethiopia and Sudan. The Eritrean government has arrested the leader of the Sudan Alliance Forces, Brig. Abdel Aziz Khalid, reportedly on suspicion of passing military information to Ethiopia (a charge that seems, on the surface, very improbable). Political prisoners in Eritrea tend to disappear for indefinite periods. His detention challenges the NDA and SPLA to demand that he be either charged or released.

28. The Chadian government is trying to steer a fine line between its political indebtedness to Sudan, and the sympathies of many influential individuals for the Darfur rebellion. The Chadians' capacity for proactive mediation is compromised by these interests, and the active presence of international observers will assist them. In particular, the African Union has both the mandate and, potentially, the capacity to take a leading role.

International Dimensions

29. The clear evidence for mass human rights violations in Darfur has energised the anti-Khartoum constituencies in Washington DC, and given new impetus to their demands for the complete isolation and overthrow of the Sudan Government. Thus far, this has translated into additional pressure on Khartoum and a greater sense of urgency in the Naivasha peace talks. However, it also means that Washington is not speaking with a single, consistent voice when it comes to finding a solution in Darfur. The GoS is understandably concerned that the U.S. will push a hardline agenda on the pretext of Darfur.

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