

Promoting Democratic Governance

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You have kindly invited me to talk on the subject of democratic governance within a post-conflict Sudan within the context of a sustainable peace - and in particular the challenges facing peace and democratic governance. This will, of course, be a crucial area in the coming year and beyond - especially in the lead-up to the referendum on the future of southern Sudan. There are three areas I would like to focus upon.

The first is to what degree the peace process within Sudan continues to be threatened by external factors - factors which ultimately have a direct bearing upon democratic governance and the culture of peace within a post-conflict Sudan?

Secondly, the outlook for democratic governance within northern and southern Sudan - and some of the problems which surface in those areas.

And, thirdly, what assistance can be provided to Sudanese political structures, north and south, to promote democratic governance?

External Factors and Peace in Sudan

Any study of the Sudanese peace process - and the prospects for democratic governance within Sudan - must examine those external forces which have sought to deny peace to Sudan and which have as a result hampered normal governance. This is for the simple reason that they may in some instances return, in one form or another, to complicate the situation in Sudan.

It is a simple fact, for example, that for much of the 1990s, whilst many Sudanese genuinely and sincerely sought to end the Sudanese conflict - and came very close to doing so - the Clinton Administration deliberately and systematically derailed every peace initiative that came into view. There are very few objective and universally respected commentators on Sudan. One is former U.S. President Jimmy Carter. He is unambiguous on this issue. Speaking in December 1999, Carter stated:

"The people in Sudan want to resolve the conflict. The biggest obstacle is US government policy. The US is committed to overthrowing the government in Khartoum. Any sort of peace effort is aborted, basically by policies of the United States...Instead of working for peace in Sudan, the US government has basically promoted a continuation of the war."

The Clinton Administration's policy was one of prolonging war in Sudan - and in so doing it actively sought to destabilise Africa's largest country. In a Sudan policy that

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otherwise a shambolic failure, this was the one thing the Clinton White House succeeded in doing.

Peace in Sudan has, therefore, always been in the hands of the United States. The present Administration has chosen to work for peace in Sudan rather than prolong the war. Its even-handed approach has had extraordinary results. Because of President Bush and Senator Danforth, Sudan stands on the brink of peace.

Two problem areas remain

The first is that the election later this year in the United States may bring in a new Democrat Administration – perhaps an administration as hostile to peace in Sudan as the Clinton Administration. Secondly, despite the commitment of the Bush White House to peace in Sudan, there still exist with the United States and on Capitol Hill powerful constituencies who at worst wish to see the war continue or at least argue for a continuation of the disastrous policies of the Clinton era.

Any return by United States policy to fostering war in Sudan will dramatically hinder any move towards democratic governance. As we have seen in example after example – not least of which recently within the United States – war, civil liberties and human rights do not mix well – and these are issues central to democratic governance.

The Outlook for Democratic Governance in northern Sudan

As clearly outlined by acting Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Charlie Snyder yesterday, northern Sudan has a considerable head-start over southern Sudan in terms of previous exposure to democratic institutions. As many of the speakers have previously outlined, post-independence Sudan has experienced a variety of forms of government, including multi-party democracies, a one-party state and military regimes. Since 1989 Sudan has experienced a military government that has sought to gradually civilianise itself.

The concept of multi-party politics has been doggedly kept alive in northern Sudan. For all the difficulties and excesses of the early 1990s, we now find ourselves in 2004 with a range of political parties operating openly in Sudan, including key opposition parties of state such as former Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi's Umma party.

There is also the fact that the party in power in Sudan – the National Congress (previously known as the National Islamic Front or NIF) – is a party that has historically always sought an electoral mandate for its policies. Additional historical circumstances also make a move to full democratic governance easier. Unlike many other countries in the Middle East and regionally, Sudan has had universal suffrage – for men and women – for several decades. Indeed, not only do women have the vote, they also sit as members of parliament and are state and federal cabinet ministers. There may well be a number of

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legitimate concerns about gender and women's issues in Sudan but with regard to the key to democratic governance, the right to vote, this is not an issue. In fact, many of the reforms that the United States and its coalition allies are struggling to implement in Iraq have already existed in Sudan for quite some time.

In short there are many parties across the political spectrum in northern Sudan and many experienced politicians within these parties, all within a politically aware environment.

Following the signing of a peace agreement between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), there will still be a number of problem areas with regard to democratic governance. One such is the current situation within Darfur in western Sudan.

For whatever reason – and we can all speculate as to its timing, coming as it does just as Sudan approaches a comprehensive peace agreement and international normalisation – Khartoum finds itself with a growing armed conflict in the west of the country, in Darfur.

The reasons that have been cited by the armed groups for this conflict include marginalisation and ethnicism. Opposition groups also point to historic underdevelopment in Darfur and claim that people from Darfur are under-represented in central government. The government points to a record of development in Darfur in 1989 and state that amongst other positions, Darfurians hold seven federal cabinet, cabinet-level and ministerial posts. There are accusations that much of the unrest has been fomented or encouraged by neighbouring countries. Sudan, for example, has lodged an official complaint at the United Nations about Eritrean involvement. What is clear – and this raises clear questions with regard to democratic governance in northern Sudan – is that Islamist extremists closely identified with Dr. Hasan al-Turabi and his Popular National Congress party are the driving force behind one of the armed groups involved in Darfur, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). Dr. Turabi has openly admitted his party's involvement in Darfur, and has similarly declared that his party's aim is the toppling of the present government. In any instance, JEM has refused to join in mediated peace talks.

This poses an immediate problem with regard to democratic governance in northern Sudan. After a period of detention, Dr. Turabi and his Islamist party have, since late 2003, been able to operate in Sudan. A clear and immediate question central to democratic governance in the coming months in Sudan will be whether the Government of Sudan – a government that following the peace process will include SPLA ministers – will act against extremist Islamist movements that overtly pose a direct threat to Sudan's democratic body politic.

It is hard to believe that Dr. Turabi and his party would be allowed to exist within the United States. Should he be allowed unfettered action in Sudan? Will it be seen as the end of democratic governance in Sudan should his party be proscribed? Additionally, given the possibility that at least one of the armed groups within Darfur, JEM, has avoided negotiations – seemingly at the behest of Dr. Turabi's party – and may be

working to destabilise the Khartoum government in accordance with Dr. Turabi's position, how will a post-peace agreement Sudanese government engage with it in a democratic discourse?

Democratic Governance in southern Sudan

There are similarities and differences with regard to democratic governance between northern and southern Sudan. The clearest difference between the two parts of Sudan is that while northern Sudan has had considerable exposure to political structures, political discourse and multi-party politics, this had not necessarily been the case within southern Sudan, especially over the past two decades.

As with northern Sudan, there are a number of possible problems ahead for democratic governance in southern Sudan.

Firstly, the IGAD-brokered peace process and outline peace agreement envisages handing over political power in southern Sudan to one political party, the SPLA. This all by itself brings with it many worrying implications for democratic governance.

Secondly, as mentioned by Assistant Secretary Snyder, the SPLA in its present form is essentially a military machine. The immediate challenge is a clear one – the transformation of the SPLA into a political party. The divisions that have existed within the SPLA are a matter of record – the SPLA has split along ethnic and political lines on several occasions in the 1990s. It has in recent months signed integration agreements with many of those factions who have previously split from the movement. This has been an encouraging development.

Thirdly, the SPLA has also historically been seen as a largely Dinka entity.

Some of the challenges to political reconciliation and democratic governance in southern Sudan are clear. Much of the war has been fought within southern Sudan. We have been told that more than two million people have died in this conflict. The sad reality, as attested to by the New Sudan Council of Churches and others, is that most of those who have died have died as the result of south-on-south violence. It is difficult to estimate what impact this may have in future politics in southern Sudan.

In looking to possible areas of concern, the government of southern Sudan may have its own potential Darfur scenario. John Prendergast has touched on it briefly. It is Ekuatoria. There are several similarities between Darfur and Ekuatoria. Many Ekuatorians claim that they have been marginalised and mistreated by both central government and the SPLA. It is a matter of record that Ekuatoria and Ekuatorians have long had clear and historically deep-rooted concerns about southern Sudanese governments. As several previous speakers during this conference have noted, the 1972 Addis Ababa peace agreement saw peace in Sudan with self-government in southern Sudan. As we also know, Sudanese President Jaafar Nimeiri moved to abrogate the agreement in the early 1980s. What is less well known is that this move was virtually unanimously supported by Ekuatorians

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– whose democratically-elected political representatives complained about the Dinka domination of the southern government. Twenty-nine out of thirty-six Equatorian Members of Parliament voted for Nimeiri's redivision.

Dinka-Equatorian relations, or more specifically SPLA-Equatorian relations, have been appalling. John Prendergast in the early 1990s recorded that the SPLA were then seen as an "army of occupation" in Equatoria. Exactly the same term was used by the BBC in 1999 and then in 2001, the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in the Sudan described the SPLA as an "occupying army" in Equatoria.

I have touched on this one example to highlight that just as in the case of northern Sudan, the challenges to democratic governance in southern Sudan are clear. The questions are obvious. Will the SPLA tolerate other parties? Will they allow and tolerate other ethnically-based parties? How will they respond to the Equatorian question if and when it is presented in the context of some form of autonomy?

What Can be Done to Assist?

Even leaving aside the vagaries of misguided international policies, the challenges to Sudan's political transformation, north and south, from war to a functioning democracy will be many and varied. Sudan must be flooded with advice and training for anyone who will listen. Political training, including everything from campaign platforms, message development, campaign strategies, coalition building all the way through to opinion-polling, must be started and where necessary jump-started throughout Sudan.

There also some clear examples of successful models for constructive international involvement in the Sudanese peace process. The United Nations oversaw key elements of the Mozambican peace process – a process which had many of the same ingredients – such as a rebel movement that had to transform itself into a political party and a government that was to be shaped by democratic elections – that can be found in Sudan.