

***Sudan and Its Neighbors:
Geopolitical Implications of a Sudanese Peace***

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Sudan has been at war, off and on since 1955. The issue of Sharia law, at first dominated the conflict. The situation and realities on the ground seem to suggest that hypocrisy and double standards of the stakeholders involved in the conflict has made it difficult for them to reach a peaceful settlement. A rebellion in southern Sudan erupted in the 1950's under "ANYANYA" and has since been continued by SPLA whose grievances were based on a rejection of attempted Arabization and Islamization of the south by various Khartoum Governments. As a result both the Sudan government and SPLA conducted military operations in the region. Those operations led to civilian deaths, destruction of property, forcing many people to flee across common borders into either parts of northern Uganda or Ethiopia and Eritrea.

With the above in mind, it should be noted that Sudan is the largest country in Africa and shares borders with Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Egypt, Libya, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo and Central Africa Republic. Any conflict in Sudan has a corresponding effect to the surrounding neighbors. Uganda has since 1950's hosted and extended humanitarian assistance to Sudanese refugees. This has had an impact on the economic and social services of the country.

Uganda's foreign policy stipulates among other things peaceful co-existence, settlement of international disputes by peaceful means and opposition to all forms of domination, racism and other forms of oppression and exploitation.

Uganda as a landlocked country is committed to the principle of peaceful existence and good neighborliness.

However in the 1990's the overall thrust of the government of Sudan was pursuing an aggressive Islamic – based foreign policy in the region. This included support for Jihad in Eritrea and Ethiopia. Incursions from Sudan territory of a multi-national group of Islamist guerillas into the Sahel region of Eritrea in 1993, proved pivotal in the decline of relations between Khartoum, Asmara and Addis Ababa. The corresponding event in Ethio-Sudanese relations (and which proved equally significant to Egyptian – Sudanese relations) was the attempted assassination of President Hosin Mubarak of Egypt on the streets of Addis Ababa in June 1995, which both Ethiopia and Egypt, concluded involved support from elements of the government of Sudan.

The incoming Bashir government (NIF) in Sudan in 1989 inherited both a civil war led by SPLM/A and a set of loose alliances with dissident Eritrean and Ethiopian groups namely TPLF and EPLF. When the TPLF and EPLF assumed power respectively in Addis Ababa and Asmara the support for SPLM/A ended and was forced thus to leave

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the country. After the expulsion of the SPLM/A, from Ethiopia in 1991, Sudan government assumed that the new principal backer and major conduit for SPLA external support was Kampala. In response the Sudan government provided military assistance to the West Nile Bank Liberation Front (WNBLF), the Alliance of Democratic Forces (ADF) and more significantly to the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), all dissident groups opposed to the NRM government of H.E President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni with a sole aim to destabilize Uganda. Uganda Peoples Defense Forces later crushed both the West Nile Bank Liberation Front and ADF rebels. While Kenya-Sudanese relations never reached such low ebb, they became increasingly tense as Khartoum objected to Nairobi's logistical assistance of SPLM/A political and humanitarian operations. For its part, concern in Kenya grew steadily in the 1990's about Islamic fundamentalism, which it was believed had the support of Khartoum.

The Government of Sudan aggressive attempts to export political Islam in the region, together with the stalled IGAD peace process served to galvanize the countries in the region and in particular Eritrea, Ethiopia and Uganda which in turn broke off relations with Khartoum. However, when war broke out on 6th May 1998 between Ethiopia and Eritrea, this marked a collapse of the unified Front of the two countries against Khartoum. Both pursued strategies to achieve, conciliatory relations with Sudan.

Uganda remains deeply concerned in the ongoing conflict in Sudan, as LRA rebels continue to carry out atrocities in northern Uganda. LRA has managed to survive this long because the leaders of this group have continued to obtain military support and sanctuary in Sudan. On many occasions Uganda People Defense Forces (UPDF) has captured arsenal from the LRA which included artillery pieces of various caliber such as heavy machine guns, rockets, landmines, bombs of various caliber, anti- aircraft guns, B-10 guns, mortars, general purpose machine guns (GPMG) and B – 21 rocket launching systems. The source of these heavy arms is now Uganda's concern. The Sudanese government has denied this, on numerous occasions.

In the past Sudan government pursued a double - faced policy on dialogue. On one hand Sudan gives excuses that it doesn't support the LRA rebels while on the other hand the Uganda government has evidence that LRA still has military bases in Sudan from which they launch incursions into parts of northern Uganda.

Virtually all LRA recruits are abducted children who are brain washed by fear and forced to commit violent acts such as shooting, hacking, burning alive men, women and children. The most horrific massacre that shocked the world took place on Saturday February 21st, 2004 in Barlonyo camp in Lira district for the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) in Northern Uganda, where over 200 women and children were slaughtered by LRA terrorists.

Similar heinous crimes had earlier been committed by LRA in 1995 in Atiak north of Lira where a total number of 240 women and children were herded in a corner and shot. The abducted children are often taken into LRA ranks as fighters and girls are turned into sex slaves.

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However, of recent LRA has suffered setbacks. Early this month the LRA attacked SPLA units between Lire and Mangala south east of Juba in the ongoing battles. LRA is also facing the wrath of Sudanese civilians reason being that the LRA recently killed several Sudanese civilians and drove away over 3000 herds of cattle from the Malera and Bari tribes.

For the first time in his seventeen-year campaign, Kony is now besieged by the Sudan government, SPLA and Sudanese tribes. The collapse of LRA rebellion will come much easier and earlier than anticipated especially when the Sudan Peace Agreement is signed. President Omar el- Bashir has declared Kony and his LRA terrorists as Sudan's enemies. President Bashir, whose country harbored Kony and his terror organization for seventeen years, issued a condemnation this month during a meeting in Khartoum with Uganda's Defense minister Hon. Amama Mbabazi. President Bashir also sent condolences to President Museveni and the people of Uganda, for the 200 people massacred by the LRA rebels at Barlonyo camp.

Sudan's wrath on the LRA follows a ghastly ambush on Sudan Peoples Army convoy on February 21st, 2004 in which a number of SPA soldiers were killed among them a brigadier and a colonel.

Uganda and Sudan have renewed for three more months starting March 1st, 2004 the protocol that allows the UPDF to pursue Kony into Sudan. President Bashir expressed a willingness to consolidate the existing cooperation in defence and reiterated Sudan government's commitment to rid Sudan of Kony and his band of terrorists.

Kony terror machine has always been unleashed on the soft civilian targets such as at Barlonyo camp in Lira. Kony's atrocities especially brutal attacks are now considered acts of terrorism against humanity. The UN is fully aware of the Kony atrocities, and many UN officials have been in Uganda and up north in particular.

The Uganda government has explored all avenues that can lead to a peaceful settlement with the rebels, including granting amnesty to the rebel group and its leaders. This gesture has been ignored and instead LRA has intensified the abduction of children and continued with the killings.

Uganda is so far encouraged by the firm stand the Sudan government has decided to take against the Lords Resistance Movement (LRA) as this will be a big step towards the end of the Kony terror in northern Uganda.