

Testimony of Warwick Davies-Webb
Research Director, Executive Research Associates
www.erassociates.co.za
The Deteriorating Peace in Sudan
House Committee on International Relations
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights, and International Operations
Wednesday, 20 September, 2006

EXTERNAL THREATS TO PEACE IN SUDAN

Efforts to promote a peaceful resolution of the crisis in Sudan - most notably the Darfur tragedy - are being undermined by a simplistic view that it is a conflict represented by Sudanese aggressors and Sudanese victims. The real situation, however, also involves a number of external actors pursuing their own specific agendas. Until US and international policy makers give greater attention to these external actors, the peace in Sudan will remain under threat.

UN Forces: Peace-keepers or Occupation Force?

There is a growing feeling in some quarters in Sudan that the entry of UN peace-keepers in Darfur will be construed by some as a sort of "occupation" force – one having nothing to do with peace, but rather one pursuing a Western or NATO agenda to destabilise Sudanese unity and sovereignty. This thinking is prevalent in the National Congress Party (NCP) and in state security structures.

The problem here is that the perception of "balance" has been lost, with respect to the transgressions and agendas of other actors in the region such as Chad, Eritrea, Libya and Uganda.

Islamic Extremists

Another very real danger is that a UN force in Darfur, one staffed and directed by Western troops, would be a catalyst for the mobilisation of a militant Islamic backlash against such a force. Already, reports are being received that Islamic Jihad units are being readied for deployment in Darfur. And even if Khartoum accepted the deployment of UN troops there are no guarantees that groups such as the Janjaweed would do similarly.

As things stand now, imposing a UN force without Khartoum's approval would be an invitation to more conflict in Darfur not less. Rather greater effort should be made to make the prospect of UN deployment a global rather than a US or NATO initiative, and one in which the composition of such a force is more neutral and includes the deployment of troops from moderate Muslim countries, as suggested by former President Bill Clinton. This would assist the UN in projecting a more-objective intervention in Sudan to Khartoum.

The African Union Force

On a more practical level, while the deployment of a UN force would take weeks perhaps months, there is already in place the African Mission in Sudan (AMIS), importantly with the consent of Sudan. The extension of the AU mandate should be an immediate priority as should the strengthening of its capacity. Consideration could be given to seconding UN command and control personnel to the AU force as well as strengthening its intelligence-gathering capability. If the UN can raise the funds and troops for a peacekeeping force, can it not raise the same support for an African one?

The Role of Regional Actors

Conflict in Sudan over the past few decades has provided a useful smokescreen for outside intervention in the country's internal affairs on a range of levels by countries that would have preferred a weakened Khartoum. During the north/south civil war, Uganda's interference in southern Sudan was well documented. More recently, it has been Chad's turn where it has used the Darfur crisis to achieve several interrelated objectives:

- Supporting rebel forces fighting Sudan in Darfur.
- Deflecting international criticism on the undemocratic nature of the Deby regime
- Using anti-Khartoum rebel forces to fight Chadian pro-democracy forces located in Darfur and the CAR.

Whatever the moral arguments for such support, it has undeniably strengthened the resolve of Khartoum to retain its military forces in Darfur, and to act aggressively against Chad-backed rebels and their civilian 'supporters'. It has also fuelled concerns that Chad -- or elements of the Chad administration -- was more concerned with strengthening the emergence of a Zaghawa-dominated ethnic region on its eastern borders.

Opposing the conflict in Darfur should not come at the price of underpinning another undemocratic regime which has been complicit in sustaining the Darfur conflict.

Other Players

The conflict of Darfur has spread to the east of Sudan, promoted by some of the Darfur parties as a means to increase the pressure on Khartoum. Thanks to Eritrea, JEM and SLA factions moved to the east where they not only receive logistical support but also founded the National Resistance Front (NRF) in Asmara on 30 June this year. It is clearly a major negative development to have a new, potential 'mini-Darfur' emerging in the east.

The DPA is being criticised for being a bad agreement because it could not get all parties to sign on. Yet it would seem that countries like Eritrea and Chad are providing some of these rebel groups with an "exit strategy" to avoid signing the DPA and continue their conflict not just in Darfur but in other areas of Sudan as well.

The role of Islamic extremists fuelling the Darfur crisis also needs closer attention. For example elements of JEM have received some support from Al Turabi's PCP, again raising questions of who is benefiting from the actions of these rebel proxy groups.

Major powers like the US which have the means to influence events in Sudan cannot ignore the role being played by such external actors as Chad, Eritrea, and others. Until more public attention is given to these outside 'spoilors', it seems unlikely that Khartoum will accept the bona fides of Washington and the UN.

Problems with the DPA

That the DPA has its weaknesses cannot be denied. Two major weaknesses can be identified:

- The first is that some key implementation issues were not properly discussed but held over in favour of getting everyone on board first to sign the agreement. This included effective mechanisms to integrate rebel armies into the SAF and to properly monitor the disarmament of the Janjaweed.
- Secondly, the key sponsors of the DPA have walked away from seeing it through to its proper implementation. A more hands-on agreement was required.

Priority clearly needs to be given to making the current agreement work rather than to start from scratch, as is being argued in some quarters; otherwise the value of future agreements are not worth the paper they are written on. This means getting the non-signatories on board.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement

Critical in dealing with the Darfur crisis is the need to maintain the credibility and integrity of the CPA. Not enough credit has been given to the role played by this US administration in ending one of Africa's bloodiest and longest civil wars.

The massive focus on Darfur has tended to overshadow growing problems confronting the CPA. This includes disputes over oil revenues, border demarcations, ethnic divides, divisions within the SPLM, a lack of development in southern Sudan, etc. It would be a major world tragedy if the CPA collapsed because the world spent all its energies on Darfur.

One major challenge is to bridge a growing policy disconnect between the SPLM leadership in Khartoum and the GOSS. The SPLM in Khartoum needs to assert its political presence in the Government of National Unity (GONU) and take joint accountability for the actions of the GONU in areas such as Darfur. There is a real concern that so long as the SPLM is unwilling to assert its political authority in Khartoum, pro-secessionist forces in the south will grow, and with it, tensions threatening the stability of the South will increase too.

Another major concern is that the Darfur crisis -- coupled to tensions between north and south, growing problems in the east, and localised ethnic tensions in the Nuba region -- does not tear Sudan apart. Critically, the emergence of disaffected groups in Sudan all demanding some sort of special political dispensation carries with it the seeds of political balkanisation and ultimately civil war preceding secession, which could have disastrous ramifications for the future of Africa. It is surely not in the interest of the US, the UN, and indeed the African Union to see Sudan descend into another Somalia.

Conclusion

To conclude, Darfur cannot always be seen in isolation. What happens in Darfur affects the viability of the CPA, and the potential for conflict in the east, and in fact the stability of the entire region. The challenge for the US and other international actors is the need to deal firmly but fairly with all the key players in Sudan, including Khartoum, the South, the Darfur rebels and the variety of external players.