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Preparing for Two Sudans

Activist Brief

By Maggie Fick | March 2010

All signs indicate that Sudan, Africa's largest state, will very soon split in two—either peacefully or violently. In a self-determination referendum scheduled for January 2011, the people of Southern Sudan are widely expected to vote for separation from their northern neighbors. In Enough's latest strategy paper, Field Researcher Maggie Fick calls for the international community, in an effort spearheaded by the United States, to help forge a framework and build the leverage for two distinct sets of negotiations: the implementation of outstanding provisions of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, or CPA, and discussion of post-referendum arrangements for an independent southern Sudan before next January's crucial vote.

Despite international attention to the upcoming elections, the trend lines in Sudan remain decidedly negative. Violence is rife in the South and in Darfur, state-sponsored political repression remains the norm in the North, implementation of key CPA provisions is effectively stalled, and a number of potentially explosive post-referendum issues remain unresolved.

In southern Sudan, spiraling insecurity threatens the referendum. More than 2,500 people were killed and 350,000 displaced last year in southern Sudan. In northern Sudan, the repressive political climate is not conducive to even marginally credible elections. The majority of northern Sudanese do not live with basic freedoms such as the ability to participate freely in opposition politics, freedom of assembly, or access to a free media. And despite a recent—and increasingly—fragile framework peace agreement between the government and the largest rebel group in Darfur, the crisis there is far from over.

The CPA offered the promise of democratic transformation. Sadly, the parties have generally not chosen to pursue this path. While the National Congress Party regime in Khartoum has often attempted to avoid implementing the spirit and letter of the CPA, the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement has sought short-term advantage and political gain or mere survival, sometimes pursuing strategies that come at a cost to its image and its already shaky democratic credentials.

There is no common strategy among the CPA guarantors and little coordination between actors—such as the Obama administration and the African Union Peace and Security Council, among others—that should be uniformly supporting the parties in defining a clear framework for two distinct sets of negotiations: the resolution of outstanding CPA provisions and the initial discussion of post-referendum arrangements. Neither of these two processes can be initiated

prior to the elections, but the international community should use the run-up to the April polls to help the parties set up the frameworks, build the leverage, and establish the security environment necessary for these processes to succeed.

1. Framework

The United States must assist the Sudanese parties in defining a framework for both sets of negotiations and then supporting this framework through a coordinated, consistent, and well-resourced international effort. The Obama administration should immediately begin harnessing qualified personnel resources for the special envoy's team and prepare to deploy them to Khartoum and Juba in order to assist in the preparations for these critical negotiations.

2. Leverage

It is imperative that the CPA's guarantors and other international actors engaged in Sudan communicate to the NCP in no uncertain terms that there is no alternative to the referendum being held on time and in an environment in which the poll can be credible. Relative international diffidence in the face of repeated NCP provocations may also embolden the party to engage in dangerous adventurism as the referendum approaches, including the seizure of disputed territories.

3. Security

When the mandate for the U.N. peacekeeping mission in Sudan, or UNMIS, comes up for renewal at the U.N. Security Council in April, the United States must call forcefully for a strengthened civilian protection mandate with an emphasis on preventative action.

Take action

Sign up for a meeting with your Representative during the upcoming Congressional recess in early April. Enough, along with our partners at the Genocide Intervention Network, feel this will be a crucial time to alert members of Congress to the elections in Sudan and the steps that must be taken by our government to ensure a peaceful Sudan emerges. Visit <http://www.genocideintervention.net/lobbyday> to sign up.

Visit <http://www.enoughproject.org/SudanNow> for more actions you can take on Sudan.