

Sudan: Humanitarian crisis in south as Comprehensive Peace Agreement unravels

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Southern Sudan faces a massive humanitarian crisis in what the United Nation's humanitarian coordinator for Sudan, Lise Grande, described as a "perfect storm".

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), signed in January 2005 between the Sudanese government and the Southern ruling elites and backed by the United States, is in danger of unravelling. It has been shown to be incapable of solving the basic needs of the vast majority of the population.

The US backed the CPA because Southern independence could allow US oil companies to re-enter Sudan and compete with their Chinese counterparts. Under the CPA, all revenue was to be shared between Khartoum and the government of Southern Sudan, and each oil-producing state would receive at least two percent of oil revenue. However, these funds did not find their way to the wider population, nor was money spent on much needed infrastructure projects.

The *Observer* newspaper quotes revealing statistics on the shocking state of Southern Sudan, which is bigger than France, with 10 states, almost 50 tribes and 400 dialects. There is one doctor per 500,000 people and just three surgeons in the whole country. One in six pregnant women die in childbirth, and there are only three midwives. A 15-year-old girl has a higher chance of dying during pregnancy than of completing school. About three percent of people have access to sanitation. The region suffers from 15 of the world's 16 deadliest diseases. Diseases that are long eradicated in other African countries, such as measles, polio and leprosy are returning, and join malaria, cholera, acute respiratory disease and HIV. Only 27 percent of girls are in school, and there are 1,000 primary school pupils per teacher. Female illiteracy is 92 percent, compared with 62 percent in Darfur.

There has been a huge increase of inter-communal violence in recent years, fuelled by widespread political discontent, a second year of drought, and a massive influx of returning refugees and displaced people. There is a plentiful

supply of weapons left over from the civil war.

An estimated two million people died during the north-south civil war through violence and disease, and four million people lost their homes. The CPA allowed for the return of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs). Two million people have so far returned from neighbouring regions, and from the north, and from Kenya and Uganda. A report by the International Organization for Migration states that conditions for the returning IDPs remain dire. They are arriving in towns and villages where there are no basic services or facilities, no shelter or healthcare, poor sanitation, no food or clean water, no jobs and little chance of education.

In May, the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General and head of the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS), Ashraf Qazi, warned that death rates in the south had outnumbered those in Darfur.

There have been sporadic clashes between local militias acting as proxies for the north and south of Sudan since the signing of the CPA in 2005. In the worst incident, in May 2008, fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Southern Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) left at least 50 people dead and scores injured, and destroyed the entire town of Abyei, with the majority of its 90,000 population displaced.

The issue of Abyei, which lies on the border between the north and south, was left undetermined in the CPA and is due to be resolved in July by a Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling. Much of the oil pumped out by the northern Sudan government is from the Abyei region. Khartoum offered to settle the Abyei question "immediately", back in February 2008, in exchange for Sudan being removed from Washington's list of state sponsors of terrorism and the lifting of economic sanctions.

As the CPA unravels, the shaky alliances that went into its signing have disintegrated. Northern and southern partners within the Government of National Unity are at loggerheads, with the northern press accusing the SPLA of corruption, inefficiency and accepting foreign funds for the coming

elections. The south accuses Khartoum of dragging its feet over a referendum on independence, and of supplying arms to fuel the ethnic clashes in the South.

Within the south too there are divisions, with the SPLM/A (the armed wing of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement) spawning several breakaway groups, and rival parties accusing the southern government of corruption and failure to defend the population. There are grievances over land reparations, migration routes and lack of development.

Increased violence has forced over 130,000 people to flee their homes in the south in the first half of 2009. Over one thousand people were killed in attacks in Jonglei and Upper Nile states in the border region between north and south Sudan between March and May. Cattle are being stolen and, most worryingly, children are being kidnapped and traded. The Southern Sudan government has shown itself to be powerless to maintain order. Southern President Kiir claims to be out of money as oil revenue has been halved by world price slumps.

The desperate population have taken to attacking humanitarian convoys. Armed men recently attacked some 27 barges carrying World Food Programme aid to 18,000 IDPs in Akobo, who are rivals of the attackers and who fled their homes in fighting earlier this year.

Southern Sudan produces over 80 percent of all the country's oil, which contributes around 70 percent of total Sudanese exports. The CPA called for elections and a referendum on southern self-determination, scheduled for February 2010 and 2011 respectively. If the south votes for independence, and an estimated 96 percent of its population reportedly favour independence, it would nullify Khartoum's existing oil-deals with foreign investors.

The Geneva-based Small Arms Survey released a report in May that warned, "The Government of Southern Sudan's security decision-making continues to be driven by what it perceives to be the unresolved conflict with the North."

It added, "Security continues to be understood in terms of the need to prepare for a possible future war, which includes the need to address perceived proxy forces and other destabilizing groups and individuals operating in the South."

The US special envoy to Sudan, retired Major General Scott Gration, recently met with delegations to discuss bilateral relations and the implementation of the CPA and the issue of Abyei. Washington promotes the idea that CPA implementation will also bolster chances for settlement in Darfur. Gration suggested that the US is willing to consider partially lifting sanctions imposed since 1997, and moving towards normalization of diplomatic relations. This approach was advocated by some during the previous Bush administration, but is vehemently opposed by sections of the

US ruling class.

In the run up to the 2008 US presidential election, the close relationship between Khartoum and Washington was denounced by Barack Obama, who called it "a reckless and cynical initiative". However, Obama appointee Gration defended the current US policy of "constructive dialogue" with the Sudanese government and openly embraced the long-established but previously downplayed tactical partnership between Washington and Khartoum, which is grounded in counter-terrorism cooperation and grew in the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the US.

Sudanese Foreign Minister Deng Alor told the Sudanese parliament recently that he expects easing of US economic sanctions and removal from the list of states that sponsor terrorism.

Gration also made a point of not characterizing the situation in Darfur as genocide. "What we see is the remnants of genocide. What we see are the consequences of genocide, the results of genocide", he said.

This provoked a furious response from US Ambassador to the UN Susan Rice and Assistant Secretary of State Philip Crowley: "We continue to characterize the circumstances in Darfur as genocide", Gration said, but added, "We recognize that in dealing with all of these challenges, we will have to deal with the Sudanese Government in some way".

Divisions abound amongst and between the US State Department and the CIA, Democrats and Republicans, liberals and neo-conservatives about how best to promote Washington's interests in Sudan and the wider region. The key geo-political factors are oil and imperialist rivalries, notably with China and Russia. The issue of genocide is used when it suits Washington to do so.

The familiar poses of humanitarian concern and moral outrage are used only to further Washington's drive for global hegemony. A declaration of genocide in a given country, under the UN charter, requires armed intervention to stop it happening. Washington's sporadic use of the term keeps the option of intervention on the table, and is used to pressure both Khartoum and Washington's rivals as it seeks to establish itself as the controlling power in North Africa and throughout the continent.



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