

United States Institute of Peace
Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Sudan Experience Project

Interview #8 - Executive Summary

*Interviewed by: W. Haven North
Initial Interview Date: June 26, 2006
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The interviewee was appointed as President Bush's Special Envoy for Sudan in September 2001 and subsequently as the U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations. His work, associated with the Sudan Peace Agreement, ended in January 2005. His assignment from the President was "to examine the state of hostilities in Sudan and advise him on whether it would be constructive for the United States to participate in a peace process." Based on his visits to several European and African countries as well as Kenya and Northern and Southern Sudan, the interviewee's advice to the President was "that the United States could fruitfully be involved in the peace process as a catalyst." He also advised that Sudan's performance on the four tests was "good on all of them."

The interviewee envisioned the U.S. role as serving as a catalyst, which included helping to ensure that all parties were working "from the same page;" helping to keep the negotiation process "on track" with only one process; calling for performance on the four tests, or indicators, to develop trust and confidence among the parties; supporting IGAD and the IGAD chairman, the UN and other participants; not providing U.S. proposals for a peace settlement plan; and providing "carrots" (U.S. recognition of the Sudan Government with related restrictions eased and development assistance) for both parties.

The main lessons learned, according to the interviewee, included underscoring the importance of: establishing specific tests or indicators of commitment to the peace process; demonstrating through a Special U.S. Presidential Envoy the active engagement and assurances of the President of the U.S.; an African-led peace negotiation process and its leadership; demonstrating with a UN Security Council resolution and special meeting on-site the full support for the Comprehensive Peace Agreement by the UN members; "carrots" that are appropriate to the interests of the parties; and a U.S. Government State Department-led coordination team on Sudan.

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Q: Just to set some boundaries on your involvement, when did you become first involved in being the Envoy on Peace for the United States Government and when did it end, or, if it has ended?

A: It began on September 7, 2001, and it ended, well, when I went to the UN, I guess, but then I was still involved in that capacity. I was Special Envoy until I went to the UN and then I became involved as the UN guy and was involved in that way until I left the UN.

Q: You had a different role with the UN after the US role?

A: I was the President's Special Envoy for Peace, until I became the Permanent Representative at the United Nations.

Q: Oh, I see. So in that role you were off and on in the New York area?

A: Yes, and we took the Security Council, remember, to Nairobi, which was a very, very, very big deal.

Q: Well, to start off, what was your understanding of the situation and your role in it when you started out on this venture?

A: Well, the President's charge to me was to examine the state of hostilities in Sudan and advise him on whether it would be constructive for the United States to participate—

Q: I see. And that was the extent of your instructions when you started out?

A: That was the instructions.

Q: And that was your first trip, then, in November of 2001.

A: Right.

Q: And what did you conclude from that trip? What was the process you went through when you took that trip? Who did you deal with?

A: Well, we went to Egypt and visited with President Mubarak. We went to Kenya and visited with President Moi. We went to Khartoum, met with various officials of the

Sudanese Government, and went to the Nuba Mountains, and then went to Rumbek in the Southern part of Sudan.

Q: Right. What was the message you were getting from these visits with heads of state?

A: That they welcomed the participation of the United States in this process, and everybody at least stated that they wanted peace.

Q: What did they think that the US could contribute to this process?

A: I think they thought that the US could contribute a lot of focus and attention. There was a widespread belief that achieving peace in Sudan depended on the engagement of the United States. But we made it clear that the United States would not come forward with its own peace plan. We were there as a catalyst to support the so-called IGAD process, and to work with other countries, and that we were not there as know-it-alls or people who would come in from the outside and try to develop something ourselves.

Q: Now how would you characterize a catalytic role in not doing that?

A: Well, first of all we had a lot of discussions with various people in various countries who were interested in Sudan, to try to make sure that everybody was on the same page and that we were on the same page with them. I made several trips to the UK, a couple of trips to Norway. I went to Italy, I went to Switzerland, and I went to Brussels to talk to the European Commission. And then in Africa, every trip I went to Kenya because that's where peace talks were taking place—but I also went to Sudan, both the Southern part of Sudan and Khartoum, and went to surrounding countries also, to Egypt and Eritrea and Uganda, just to make sure that everybody was on the same track.

Q: When you say, "on the same track," what do you mean by "the same track," what was this that track you were discussing with them?

A: First of all supporting the IGAD peace process, and supporting particularly the efforts of General Sumbeiywo and making sure there was a point where there were sort of two different peace efforts going on. One was the IGAD peace process and the other one involved Egypt and Libya. The problem with two peace processes going on was the Government and the SPLM could kind of pick and choose and play both against the other. So we wanted to make sure that there weren't two different peace processes, that there was one.

Q: How do you bring about just having one?

A: Oh, just talking to people and getting the assurances by President Mubarak, the then-Foreign Minister in Cairo, and the Kenyans, in particular President Moi, that everybody was part of the same process. Getting more communication among the various parties, I think that that helped.

Q: Did that draw the Libyans in or draw them out of the process?

A: They were, as far as I know. I never knew what their involvement was with the Egyptians, but my impression was it was more nominal than real.

Q: And it faded away.

A: We developed four, what we called, tests for the two sides. I don't know if you've seen the memo that I wrote to President Bush...

Q: No, I haven't seen it, but I take it we should get it. It would be good to have it if it's not classified.

A: I don't think it is, but I'm not sure.

Q: What were main findings?

A: It was a progress report on these four tests, and generally advice that the United States could fruitfully be involved in the peace process as a catalyst. It was approximately six or seven months after I was appointed Special Envoy. I told the President at the time that he had asked me to basically find out the feasibility of US engagement, so this was a memo to him reporting on that feasibility and describing these so-called tests and the status of the tests.

Q: And these three tests were what?

A: There were four of them. One was a ceasefire in the Nuba Mountains, and the delivery of humanitarian aid in the Nuba Mountains. One was what we called "days of tranquility," which was to get a certain number of days set aside periodically for, basically, health workers to work on polio vaccinations and so forth. One was for civilian immunity from attack, and a commission set up on civilian immunity.

Q: Which civilians, Sudanese or outsiders?

A: Just people in Sudan who were civilians who were being attacked.

Q: Wasn't there something about investigating the slavery practice?

A: Oh, slavery, Yes. There was a commission set up on that.

Q: Well, what kind of understanding were you able to achieve in terms of satisfying those indications?

A: Well, the report that I made to the President was that developments were good on all of them.

Q: Good on all of them. They were all possible to be achieved.

A: They were all doing well, and Nuba Mountains was a great success.

Q: I see.

A: The “days of tranquility” had created some problems, but basically it was a favorable report. The point of view was that each of these were concrete, each of them involved a requirement that the parties do something and change.

Q: You went out in the first of November. Were you involved in this project getting the CPA process underway or what was your role at that point?

A: Well our role was not so much to get it underway but to try to make sure that we weren’t going to be a further fly in the ointment., and to try to make sure that there was one peace process, not two or three, and that everybody was pulling together so that all the outside influences that could be brought to be bear were speaking with one voice. And, also, saying to the parties, “If you want peace, were not going to rely just on what you tell us orally. We want to find out what you’re going to do, and therefore we’re going to set up these four tests.”

Q: I see. And you were there how long on that first trip?

A: Oh, I don’t know. My memory of it is that we went to Cairo first. . I could be wrong on this, maybe we went to Sudan first. But we went to Cairo, we went to Nairobi and we went to Sudan. From there, we started out in Khartoum, and then flew to the Nuba Mountains and then on to Rumbek.

Q: And was it part of your role in this to establish the U.S. involvement or interest in being involved or what?

A: Well, what I said to the parties was that the President asked me to examine the situation and report back to him on whether there’s any prospect fore peace and whether the United States could be helpful.

Q: And then you took a trip through Europe and reviewed it with the Europeans.

A: I can’t remember, honestly, what I did when.

Q: Well, I think the record shows in December you went to Europe and talked to the Europeans.

A: Yes, I remember in December because I remember when I was in Oslo it was very close to the Winter Solstice, there wasn’t much light.

Q: And then you went back to Sudan in January of 2002. What was the purpose of that mission?

A: I'm sure it was about that the same. To see what was happening on these tests. Talk to both of the parties.

Q: I gather at some point you that this had satisfied the tests and then—what was then our role after that?

A: That was the subject of the memorandum I wrote the President, and that really pretty much sets out—you should really try to get that from whomever— what I thought were the prospects of what I thought that the United States could be engaged in, provided that there was continued progress, and that we should always have the possibility of saying, “Well, this is useless.”

Q: Our role, then in a sense, was sort of focused more on observer than on instigator of discussions, or what?

A: I've always characterized our position as being catalytic, certainly more than an observer. And certainly less of the purveyor of our peace plan.

Q: And so, I must have asked this before, but the catalytic function, how did you go about being catalytic, in a sense? How did that process work?

A: Well, we developed these four tests.

Q: Right, on beyond that?

A: We went to both Cairo and Nairobi to make sure that there weren't two peace plans out there.

Q: Yes, I remember, right.

A: That there was only one peace plan. I think that, to me, one of the things that happened that was really interesting and I think has ongoing meaning, was that following summer—it was probably around June or July of '02, and I had made, I don't know, two or three trips by then to the country—the top person in the Sudanese Embassy in Washington, a man named Ambassador Khidir, flew out to St. Louis and had lunch with me. And he said when he was out here that his Foreign Minister had sent him or asked him to come to ask me one question. And his question was, “Are we damned if we do, and damned if we don't?”

Q: Meaning?

A: Meaning, does it make any difference with respect to US-Sudanese relations whether or not we'd have a peace agreement.

Q: And we replied?

A: I replied, "Let me find out and get back to you." So I visited with the President before my last trip, and he said, "No." He wanted to move forward with normal relations with Sudan, conditioned on peace but with humanitarian access and cooperation on counter terrorism. And then I went on to my next trip and told that to President Bashir. I think, when you talk about catalytic, I believe that what the Sudanese wanted was normal relations with the U.S. That was the carrot we held out for them. And the difference between the way the Bush Administration handled Sudan and what happened before is that the Bush Administration offered Sudan the prospect of normalizing relations with the U.S., getting off the State Aid to Terrorism List, getting out from under economic sanctions, upgrading diplomatic status so both sides were represented by ambassadors, having travel restrictions in the U.S. lifted. That was what they wanted from the U.S., and that was what they thought they were going to get.

Q: And that was sort of a condition of their cooperating on the Peace Agreement?

A: That was the carrot. In fact, it wasn't just talking to the President. When I went to Brussels to meet with the representatives of the European Commission, they had some money set aside for the development of Sudan, so the notion was that the rest of the world was waiting for peace, and the rest of the world would be there with real benefits for Sudan if there was peace, that there would be a peace dividend. There would be a financial dividend, and also a dividend with respect to the upgrade of relations.

Q: Did the US offer financial aid to, as part of that?

A: Certainly held out the carrot.

Q: And you think that was pretty critical in the process of getting the Sudanese Government involved?

A: I think that the Government witnessed the fact that they sent their Ambassador to St. Louis to talk to me—was interested in what's in it for them if they have peace.

Q: Were you involved at all in the shaping of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement? You had a number of protocols.

A: Yes, well we were more than one. But there was a particular issue relating to Abyei, one of the three provinces in the middle of the country, which everybody was stymied on. When we went out to wherever those peace talks were taking place at the time, we went out there with a suggestion on how to solve the Abyei problem.

Q: What was that?

A: I don't know.

Q: I see. Probably—

A: But it was—it had a number of parts to it.

Q: Were you part of a team?

A: Yes, and we had presented that idea and both sides did agree to it, so that was the only real U.S. involvement, that I knew of anyhow, with respect to suggesting a specific, detailed, way out of a particular problem at the peace negotiations. But we had talked a lot with Garang about whether they would be permitted to keep their military and under what circumstances. There was a lot trying to convince each side to be forthcoming and to be not hard-nosed.

Q: You say, “we,” are you talking yourself or who was with you?

A: We always had a group doing all this, going to the meetings and so on.. My role, as I pointed out, I was not State Department. I was the President’s Envoy. I answered to the President and was not part of the State Department. And that’s what I think I added to this, the brief on me is “not a State Department guy, but the President’s guy.”

Q: Were you thought of as the catalytic role among the U.S. delegation or group? What was your role with the group, would you say?

A: First of all, I was obviously respectful of the role of the State Department, but I thought what really carried weight with both sides in Sudan was that not only was the State Department engaged in this, but the President of the United States personally was engaged, and that the President’s engagement was reflected by my appointment as the Special Envoy. And in fact that was true. The President was personally very, very, very engaged with the question of Sudan. Every single time I went over there and I talked to him, I either met with him person or we spoke on the phone before I went.

Q: I see. But, your relationship with the group, because it’s very important in this sort of U.S. Government coordination process and a lot of these things, how did this group coordinate itself? Who was the one to come to any consensus on what should be done?

A: I think for the first, I’d say about nine months of it, the group really saw the importance of the four tests. But there were a lot of people who were interested in it, you know, from different agencies and State Department bureaus.. There were a lot of people, you know, sometimes there would be points of disagreement. One said right off the bat that he hated the idea of Special Envoys.

Q: I see. Why do you think he said that?

A: Because he thought it was a State Department operation, not this guy from St. Louis.

Q: Right, I understand that. So being a representative of the President made a great deal of difference to all of them, I'm sure. Let me ask you in another category about some of the primary actors in this outside of the U.S. group. We don't need to go through all of them in detail, but which one did you think had a particularly important role among the European groups, the UN, the local groups and so on? How would you characterize the engagement of other groups in trying to bring this process about?

A: Well, first of all, I think that the general who was designated by then-President Moi to be the principal IGAD negotiator, I think he should get the Nobel Prize. He is really good. And he was the one who was day in and day out working on this, and with great skill and great patience.

Q: And he brought the parties together and kept them together?

A: He was great, he just was right there when Kenya had the peace talks with both sides. The patience of Job.

Q: Did he provide any substantive suggestions about how to work things out or was he just sort of holding ...?

A: Well, I wasn't there day in and day out, but my understanding is he was pretty reticent about offering substantive suggestions but he sure kept the parties talking.

Q: I see. That was the important part. Who else was influential in the process?

A: I thought that the Norwegians were terrific.

Q: And what did they do?

A: They were just very present and they had a particularly good relationship with the SPLM and were able to talk to them very well. But their Foreign Minister — I guess she was the Foreign Minister — Hilda Johnson, was really good. I think they were really terrific. The British were very, very involved, and trying to remember the chief British guy who was always there, his name has escaped me.

Q: And they got involved on their own, sort of initiative?

A: Well, we were all talking to each other all the time. And if you went down to the peace talks in Kenya, it was like a convention of interested countries. I mean, the Norwegians were always there, the U.S., and representatives of the IGAD countries were always there. And I think that helped a lot, the fact that there was that kind of attention from the world. I think had a very positive effect.

Q: What about the non-Governmental organizations —NGOs -- and religious groups and so on, were any of that involved, in any way?

A: Within the United States, the interest of Christian activists I think weighed very heavily with the President and I'm sure was part of his personal interest in it.

Q: But in the country, there were probably whole regional mediators or someone within the country itself, were there any of that kind of group?

A: I don't know.

Q: Let's move on a little bit further. What was your sense of how the negotiations flowed and so on, I guess, when you were involved in it, and how did the process go? What were the significant steps that matter or challenges that had to be faced as the process went ahead as they led towards the CPA?

A: Well, every point was very hard and very slow going. No trust between the two sides. Although it was very interesting to see them in operation because every time you'd see them in the same room with each other they'd be chatting with each other and they'd look like long-lost friends. But I think the actual negotiations were pretty hard.

Q: There was a lack of trust between the two groups, as far as you could tell?

A: Yes. Especially on the part of the SPLM towards the Government.

Q: Were there any specific steps taken that you could tell to help build some trust?

A: Well, when we developed the four tests right at outset, the purpose of those tests was to do that, to be sort of confidence-building measures.

Q: And so you applied those during discussions and negotiations?

A: We got an agreement on those four points, which was a very good starting point.

Q: Were there any problems getting agreement on those?

A: It took a little bit of time, but basically in six months or less those were pretty much wrapped up.

Q: You haven't been much involved in the implementation after the CPA was signed—it was signed in January of 2005. You were then—

A: I was the UN Ambassador at the time, and yes I went there for that.

Q: And what was the role of the UN Resolution on this?

A: That was really key.

Q: Really key?

A: Yes.

Q: How did that affect the process?

A: The whole Security Council went to Nairobi for a meeting of the Security Council in November of '04, during the U.S. Presidency of the Security Council. And it was only the third time since 1946 that the Security Council had met outside of New York. But we had the Presidency and we thought that this would be a dramatic thing to do, to take the whole Security Council to Nairobi, which we did. And we formally met in Nairobi at whatever they call the conference center there and adopted a Resolution which we had worked out the details of on the plane ride over. But the main thing wasn't the wording of the Resolution. The main thing was that all fifteen members of the Security Council were of one mind, that we were all present, and in our presence John Garang and Vice President Taha signed an agreement to reach an agreement.

Q: I see. They were there with the Security Council?

A: They were there, in our sight. With us standing behind them, they signed an agreement that they would reach a final agreement in January—or, to reach an agreement. Then they did reach the agreement in January, when they signed the Agreement in January of '05.

Q: So that must have been an impressive event.

A: Great day. It was coming along, sort of. It cost everything, but still, that was a great idea.

Q: How did that idea come up—how to get a consensus, to get the Security Council to do something like that? I don't think they would do it very often, I guess.

A: No, it was tough. They were not happy about it. We resisted great concern that, "Well what happens if this doesn't go well? What happens if we show up and put the pressure on and nothing happens? Doesn't this hurt the credibility of the Security Council?"

Q: Were there any chance of that?

A: Sure.

Q: So someone had to be communicating with the Sudanese part to be sure they were present, I guess, right?

A: Yes, I mean, they were going to be present, but that doesn't necessarily mean that anything would have come of it.

Q: Congress, you know, passed this Peace Act. Did that have any role in this at all?

A: Well, it simply showed that Congress was attentive and watchful. The Government thought that it was an unfriendly act, but I think that it was positive.

Q: It tended to reinforce the present division, I guess, or no?

A: I can't remember the details of the Sudan Peace Act, but my recollection of it was that it was deemed by the Government of Sudan as being a minus.

Q: Right, right. Well, have you been involved at all in terms of implementation of the CPA since then?

A: No.

Q: So, do you have any sense of how it's going? It's a pretty complicated agreement is the best I can figure out, in terms of the number of protocols and so.

A: You know what, here's what I think. I think it's probably going all right. I'm not sure. I don't know the details, but, they are going to have an election in what, five years, on whether the South breaks away. I think the future of Sudan depends on normalizing relations with the U.S. and the rest of the world, and showing a peace dividend. There was a pledging conference in Oslo about a year ago or so, and it seems to me that four-point-something billion dollars was pledged. I thought that was very important. The U.S. pledged a good part of that, something like \$1.7 billion sticks in my mind, but it's all been conditioned on Darfur. So right now the situation is that Darfur has prevented the U.S. from doing exactly what the Government of Sudan was interested in when they sent their Ambassador up to talk to me in St. Louis. So, I've always believed that you have to offer carrots to the Government of Sudan, and that the carrots have not been forthcoming.

Q: Do you think the CPA had an impact on the Darfur situation, in affecting that at all?

A: I don't see how. Maybe somebody who's more sophisticated than I am would see that, but I don't. I think what happened was the other way around. The situation in Darfur has ruined the possibility of normalization and the peace dividend coming from it, and road-building, you know, that kind of thing, that would show a real result. I mean, there are no roads in the South of Sudan. It's just something as dramatic as that. Some dramatic program would have take place showing that there was really a benefit from all of this, that's really important.

Q: So, do you think the Darfur crisis will upset the Peace Agreement process?

A: I think that the Darfur situation has made normalization and a peace dividend impossible.

Q: Well, I don't know all of the areas you've been involved in on this, but are there aspects that you learned from this, on what worked and what didn't work? I think I've got a sense of some of those, but are there maybe some other aspects that you were involved in that would be helpful in this?

A: When I was asked to do this job, I went around and visited with people who were interested in Sudan, particularly members of Congress, and they all said the same thing to me. They all said, "Well, there's no moral equivalent between the people of the South and the Government of Sudan." And my view was, "Well, I'm sure that's true, but what am I to do with that observation?" Because, if my job is to be the moral arbiter, I didn't see how that would help us. And it seemed to me that my job and the job of the United States was to try to be a catalyst to help bring about peace. And the way to do that was to engage both sides, not to say, "We like your side or hate your side," but to engage both sides and without being the moral arbiter between the two. It was important for the U.S. to say if the President of Sudan did agree to talks, that we would offer better relations to the Government of Sudan if peace comes. And then came Darfur, and there's a little bit of a goalpost moving. People are being killed in Darfur, but I believe that engagement with both sides works better than going in and trying to throw your weight around.

Q: What was the carrot that we offered to the Southern group? You talked about the Government's men, but what was the carrot for the Southern group?

A: Development. Because much of the development would have been in the South. They would have had peace, they would have had some oil revenue, they would have had developmental assistance.

Q: You weren't involved in the issues about oil revenues and security and all those various things?

A: That was part of the overall discussion, but I was not personally involved with that.

Q: Well, what other lessons come to mind? You have mentioned lessons that are very good and useful, but are there other thoughts you have on that?

A: Engagement of the U.S. is important. Carrots are important. And I think it's important if you're going to offer carrots that you do what you say. I mean, I'm not blaming us for saying, "Well, wait a second, Darfur creates real complications." Of course it does. But, I think that that really is a shame.

Q: Yes, it is. We talked about the UN role and the key points. Is that important?

A: Well first, the appearance of the Security Council, just from the standpoint of moral suasion, in Nairobi was very important. Secondly, while I was at the UN we had frequent—frequent like two or three—resolutions that we passed on the Darfur situation, keeping that in the world's attention. I thought that was an important thing to do. I think UN peacekeepers are important. I think that there are UN peacekeepers in the rest of the

country, but I'm not sure about that, but there should be in Darfur now. The Government says it doesn't want them, but I think they are important because obviously the African Union is not doing—

Q: What about the role of the IGAD? Is that so unique or is that—

A: That was terrific. Sumbeiywo was terrific. And it was a real winner for IGAD and for the credibility of IGAD.

Q: And the African countries were able to hold together on a common approach.

A: Yes.

Q: And what about the European involvement, how did you see that?

A: Very positive. World attention is good.

Q: Well, are there any other thoughts or lessons that you want to convey on this? I think all that you've done has been very helpful and very useful, but I don't want to cut off anything that you might want to add.

A: Well I think that there is a live issue right now in the world of Presidential Envoys. Some didn't like the idea, but I thought that it was useful. I'm not saying that I did anything special, but I think that it is very important to say to both sides that President Bush is personally interested in this. And to be able to go there every time and be able to say, "I just talked to the President and his message is X."

Q: Right, that's a key point. Are you going to be involved any more? Is there any more in your engagement?

A: Not that I know of.

Q: Well, have we covered it?

A: I think you have.

Q: I keep pressuring you with questions, but I wonder—I had a lot of questions to offer you but I think we touched on—

A: I think if you can get that report. Again, I'm pretty sure it's a public document, but if you can get that report that I wrote to the President—

Q: This is in December of 2001?

A: No, I think it was April of '02.

Q: April of '02. I'll put it down.

A: I'm pretty sure that was a public document.

Q: All right, we will—

A: That will give you in more detail what I had done up to that point, where I had gone, what I had done, and what the four points were, and what the status of them was.

Q: That would be very helpful. Well, anything else you want to add at this point?

A: I don't think so.

Q: Well, you've been extremely helpful and it's been very helpful, and I appreciate the opportunity to talk with you.

A: Glad to help.