

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

Interview #14 - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Interviewed by: Marilyn Bruno
Initial Interview Date: August 18, 2006
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The Interviewee has been following Sudan issues since 1988. In 2002, he assembled a team to assess the Sudanese oil sector, a key to the potential success of the revenue-sharing arrangement between the North and the South outlined in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). In the opinion of the Interviewee, reliance on future Sudanese oil revenues has been exaggerated. The petroleum reserves of Sudan, realistically calculated at 3 billion barrels (compared to Libya's 40 billion barrels), are below the widely-held expectation.

The Interviewee pinpointed several elements that are placing a drag on the implementation of the CPA, particularly in the areas of security and wealth-sharing. In addition to the generations-old distrust between the North and the South, both sides are displaying a lack of political will to move the process forward at this point in time. This could be attributed to the lack of inter-party unity on both sides, their generally weak institutions and lack of capacity, as well as the weight of the unresolved Darfur conflict. The North continues to have an enduring interest in emerging from its strategic isolation and ending war, but does not necessarily want to quickly withdraw its forces from the South or loosen its grip on the control of oil revenues. The South has not yet institutionalized a viable government with strong, charismatic leadership, and sorely lacks the infrastructure needed for robust development. The South has not yet demonstrated its ability to control the disbursement of oil revenues or provide for its own security.

But, more problematic, in the view of the Interviewee, is the uncertainty of the end game of the CPA process at this time: national unity under a sort of federation, or secession of the South. The lack of a clear end game is spurring dissent from other Sudanese groups, who feel marginalized by the CPA's focus only on North and South interests. The open-ended nature of the end game is further complicated by the ambiguous position of the U.S. on the issue, which has not declared support for either a federation or Southern secession, but which continues to award the majority of its foreign assistance to the South. Most importantly, the U.S. has lost influence with Khartoum due to its policy in Iraq.

According to the Interviewee, one solution would be engaging the UN to become more directive, as in the case of the Bosnian High Representative, and to place conditions on further progress. For example, the UN could place its forces on the ground in Darfur

and ensure that Khartoum controls the Janjaweed, and closely coordinate the establishment of Joint Task Forces for security affairs. Additionally, the U.S. should urge our allies, particularly Norway, to take the lead on Sudanese policy.

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Q: This is the 18th of August. My name is Marilyn Bruno. I am interviewing an official of a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO). We're going to talk about the implementation of the CPA (Comprehensive Peace Agreement) as it relates to his work. First of all, thank you very much for meeting with me. Do you have any overview of how you got involved with Sudan or how long you've been working on Sudanese issues?

A: I started working on Sudan when I was working on House Foreign Affairs, Africa Subcommittee, which was from '87 to '91. So I started traveling to both SPLM (Southern People's Liberation Movement)-controlled territory in '88, as well as into Khartoum and the transition zone. I started working in Sudan really in October of '88. It was in that context that I got first engaged. I lived in Ethiopia, in '91 to '93 and was in some border areas watching what was going on in Sudan. Later, when I joined the Secretary's policy planning staff, which was '96 to 2000, I had responsibility for Africa policy. It was in that context that Sudan was subject to lots of discussion and debate and review. And then in 2002, I came to this NGO. One of the first things we did was to undertake a review of U.S. approaches to Sudan. That was inspired by the sort of acute awareness among many people that, under the Clinton Administration, we were in a complete stalemate in terms of what we were trying to do, that existing policies had sort of run their course, and that there was a need for some sort of refreshed approach. So that's what we did in 2000, and then we stayed involved after that. We put out a report that I think shaped to some degree the perceptions of the Bush Administration, and prompted them to think more seriously about trying to make a run at a negotiated settlement. We rolled out our review in 2000 at the Holocaust Museum in February of 2001, right at the beginning of the Bush Administration, with Senator Frist, John Henry, and others. The fundamental conclusion was that current policies to ostracize, isolate, condemn and hope for the disappearance of Khartoum were not working, and that we needed our own approach there to engage and search for a negotiated settlement to the war. I think that had some influence on the behavior of the Bush Administration. I think it was seen as a non-partisan approach that came out in favor strongly of making a try at a negotiated settlement. It was fairly controversial among the activist community that was pretty hard over about basically a regime change in Khartoum. They were disappointed to see that option challenged.

So then we stayed involved. We went out to Machakos, to the negotiations in the Summer of 2002. We were invited by the Special Envoys to go out and to work up an

analysis of the oil sector and to present models of wealth sharing. So I put a team of six people together and we went up to Machakos for about a week. Also in 2003, this NGO brought in officials from the health sector of both the SPLM and the Government of Khartoum to Washington, and that was with the support of the State Department. There again, the idea was that there were serious, grave health challenges on the horizon. These guys hadn't talked to one another. This was an area where you might imagine some possibility of cooperation. So we brought them here, had a large conference, had them sign a common communiqué. So those were some of the things we'd done at this NGO, as well as a variety of ad hoc other things. But the general approach that we've taken for the last couple of years is to try to hold informed, civil, adult conversations about what was going on Sudan. In other words, we tried to avoid the loud shouting matches that tend to happen in a lot of these gatherings. We've tried to bring together regularly the Administration, Hill staff, the NGO community, emergency and development and relief people for discussions around the status of what was going and that was a true and a lead up to the CPA and beyond.

One other thing I want to mention. We were commissioned by the State Department to undertake in 2004 a review of U.S.-Africa policy. This was something that Congress had called for and funded. We took a very sizeable chunk of the resources from that and asked the post-conflict reconstruction section of this NGO to field the team, go out to Sudan, travel all around, and write a strong, dense analytic piece on the following: if and when you get to a negotiated peace settlement between the North and the South, what are going to be the key outstanding issues? That was published, and was recently updated. I'm very proud of that piece of work. So these are the kinds of products that we've brought forth.

Q: So here we are exactly at this point in time asking how the CPA implementation is going. Is it being monitored? What is your opinion on this?

A: Well it's being monitored. There's a big review coming up on September 11 over at NDU (National Defense University) that will bring forward some of the main personalities looking at it. The picture is mixed. I think there's been some significant progress in certain areas, other areas are stalled, and it's hard to make judgment of exactly where things are going in yet other areas. The picture is certainly not desperate. We shouldn't be surprised that implementation is slow and very uneven under the circumstances in Sudan. I don't find that at all surprising.

Q: So we're saying that it's been pretty successful so far but with obstacles. What are the things undermining or diverting the implementation process?

A: Tremendous distrust, lack of unity on both sides in terms of the will to carry this thing forward. There are internal divisions on both sides. There are weak institutions. The Accord itself calls for the creation of a multitudinous number of institutions that are far too many. And the fact it is that the end state is so ambiguous. It is an Accord that allows for the secession of the South at the conclusion of a six-year period. This builds in strong incentives to basically buy time and it creates, from the perspective of Khartoum,

very deep ambiguity around what is really driving the behavior of the other side. So, there is this constant guessing game going on around regarding what's going on here and going on there. The other thing that is weighing on all of this is Darfur. The Darfur crisis hangs over the North-South Peace Accord and further distracts, further aggravates the tensions between the sides, further deepens the suspicion that each side is engaged in deliberately stoking this crisis in Darfur. So you've got havoc in Darfur. And so in terms of Northern instability, there are plenty of grievances. The CPA was shaped up as something that basically preserved the power of the SPLM and the power of the existing government in Khartoum. At least for a period of several years, this was a cause for worsened discontent, clearly, particularly in the North. So the idea that this was a democratizing thing was somewhat complicated.

When you ask about the progress of implementation and what were the difficulties and the drags, you have to put a focus on the inherent interests that the two sides have in carrying this thing forward. I think there are enduring, strong interests by both sides to make sure this thing does not fail. Those are the same interests that account for why they agreed to the CPA in the first place. Khartoum needed to get out from underneath this war. The majority of those in Khartoum reached a conclusion that they can live without the South if need be, and that there's a case to be made for being unencumbered. They're kind of sticking with this, and it all has to do with getting out of a strategic isolation, particularly with the West. The SPLM doesn't want the CPA to fail if the result is chaos. That simply creates an image that the South is ungovernable and it is a mess, another failed form of governance. And there's not much in the South. There is very little there in terms of infrastructure. The SPLM is not really a structured, institutionalized movement. It was made up of one strong man and 1,200 platoon commanders, and the strong man's gone. So, the SPLM has a strong interest in keeping this thing afloat in order to keep the money coming in, and the protection, and the identification with the U.S. and the West. They need the CPA to realize the vision of having a viable self-governing South.

Q: The capacity of both sides is a big issue, but more so in the South?

A: Well the South has no capacity, so yes. The South has to be worried about its ability to stand up a semi-governing state. The South also has to be worried about whether it will be simply overwhelmed by the temptations of all this cash coming in.

Q: There are some recent articles on that that I've read on that.

A: Yes.

Q: Did you meet with Salva Kiir when he was here in Washington several weeks ago?

A: No. But I think there's an argument that Salva Kiir may not have the same level of authority as John Garang, but he also does not engage in the same level of mischief. Garang was involved in the early days in kicking off the SLA (Sudan Liberation Army) insurgency in Darfur. He bears some responsibility for having encouraged those folks to

go in there and knock out 34 military garrisons in a six-week period of time. Those were very provocative military actions and they were very deliberately provocative. So I don't think Salva Kiir necessarily would have thought it was in their interest to stoke havoc in Darfur in the eve of having a signed Peace Agreement.

Q: We see this alleged lack of will on both sides to move forward expeditiously, but they do have a current interest in succeeding and moving forward. Are certain participants not living up to their end of the bargain? Is this a North policy and a South policy or is it some people in the North would like to move forward but others don't? Because you mentioned a rift within each group.

A: Well, look at the security side of things. The garrisoning and withdrawal of forces has proceeded apace. The deployment of the UN forces has proceeded apace. But, there are no combined, Joint Task Forces. And that's pretty telling, you know. As far as the wealth sharing, there's a lot of squabble going back and forth around the setting up those mechanisms, the disclosure procedures, and all of that. Big money has changed hands. It's not clear where that money is, it's not clear what use it's being put to. I think there's plenty of bad faith, and there's plenty of incompetence and lack of capacity. Things are still moving forward, however. They're not stalled out in permanent crisis.

Q: How did the U.S. Government, think tanks, or advisors help to get the Joint Task Forces established? Is there any specific training that we could offer or is this something that we should intervene with or nudge at this point?

A: Well you could do it through whatever the UN oversight mechanism is. It's not unlike the Balkans, the Bosnian Dayton Accord, you know, where these various federal entities were not formed. In the case of Bosnia, the High Rep became more and more autocratic and directive. I don't know if that's possible in the Sudan setting because you don't have the High Rep, who was aided by the presence of initially 60,000 native forces. In the case of Sudan, you're going to have 10,000 forces, and they weren't forces that were deployed for military purposes initially. But you could imagine the office of Pronk making this a major priority as a way of pushing their things. You could begin to condition certain things on these Joint Forces. But it all gets back to the fundamental ambiguity at the core of all this. If the parties themselves don't want to form these things, what they're suggesting is that they're opting for this eventual secession. That's their choice under the terms of this Accord. It's not our role to be insisting that everything be honey and cream.

Q: We should not try to influence them one way or the other?

A: Right. We ourselves are very conflicted and ambiguous about what we want to see as the outcome. Do we really want to see a unitary state? Do we really want to see a union of the South with the Government of Khartoum? Or, are we in favor of an independent Southern state? Are we as a matter of U.S. policy laying the groundwork for that? There's no clear definition.

Q: It seems that we're not laying the groundwork for either federation or independence.

A: I think that most of what we're doing in terms of our foreign aid programs is directed towards an independent South. I think we are very much identified with the central cause of the South and its leadership. It may not be politic or diplomatic to say that expressly.

Q: No, but many times before, certainly Congress is leaning that way.

A: Yes.

Q: So it's not a question of will, it's a question of edging forward through confidence-building and then continually reassessing which is the best solution. But you've mentioned the revenue-sharing and you seem to have great familiarity with this from your work directly on the ground. Is there anything that could make this more of a transparent operation or is there obstruction to even make it transparent?

A: No, I think there's more that you can do to make the process transparent, but it's very, very hard. First of all, Khartoum controls the books. It's very easy to be concealing things. Second, the SPLM is hard to help. They won't take up many of the offers that are put on the table.

Q: Such as?

A: Well, for training in these areas. They are hyper-sensitive about these things.

Q: But the actual oil fields are sort of split from what I understand, between North and South.

A: Some are in the transition zone. There are discoveries on both sides. There is debate on exactly how extensive those discoveries are and there's a suspicion now that there have been a couple major discoveries in two blocks in the South that are basically being held in abeyance until it's clear what the final legal status is. This is a point we made back in 2002. As long as there's great uncertainty hanging over whether there's going to be two states or one, it creates the incentive for postponing the exploration and production in the South and in the North until that is settled. You're not going to want to have wholesale ownership of those assets, not split. It will be very difficult to find investors to come in and bring that oil to the surface, because it is going to be very, very costly in Sudan because of the lack of infrastructure, because of the swampland, because of the structure of the geological fields themselves, because the basins themselves are very scattered in small deposits across a very broad swath. It will be very expensive and logistically very difficult.

Q: You can't do that horizontal drilling technique?

A: Not if you've got small deposits. Sudan is not sitting on a sea of oil. This is not Libya, this is not Nigeria, and this is not Angola. This is pretty small beer in the overall picture.

Q: So much stock is being put in these reserves.

A: Way too much. There's gross exaggeration about how many oil deposits are down there. Proven reserves are only three billion barrels. Proven reserves in Libya are 40 billion. Proven reserves in Angola are 25. Proven reserves in Nigeria are over 40.

Q: Oh, so this is quite a tempest in a teapot for that.

A: The activists have just gone nuts creating the image of a sea of oil. As has the SPLM itself, and Khartoum. Everyone's hyped this issue. But we go and ask the hard questions, such as where's the size of the data. what are the proven reserves, what's being produced? They've got the production levels up, but those are old fields and those old fields are going to decline beginning at the end of this decade and they're going to decline very rapidly.

Q: Well, you can't sustain governments on gum Arabic.

A: They need new discoveries. They may find new discoveries. But also Khartoum is attracting lots of investment capital.

Q: Which is what they want. And the South maybe is doing the same just to build infrastructure.

A: They're getting money from donors, World Bank, Bilateral, DFID, USAID (United States Agency for International Development). But they also don't have control of their ground, they don't have control of their own infrastructure, they don't have much of an infrastructure. They have a lousy road system and no rail system. It's very hard to move around and there's no elementary security in large segments of the South.

Q: And I also understand that for six months of the year, there's not much you can do anyway because of the rains.

A: That's right.

Q: Did you encounter that when you were there?

A: Yes.

Q: So what do people do? I mean, how do you undertake construction?

A: You know, it's a very difficult environment. It's going to be hard going. One of the big questions is whether the U.S. interests have any staying power. As long as horrible

things are happening in Darfur, this amazing mobilized constituency in the U.S. will remain active and keep pressure up. But if Darfur is fixed somehow and sort of recedes into just being a miserable situation versus an outrageous and miserable situation, and if the North-South Peace Accord stumbles and continues to just muddle through, and if power in Khartoum were to shift so that the crowd that's in there now looks different or is different, the pressure may let up.

Q: What is the likelihood of that?

A: Who knows.

Q: Is this because the Islamists are becoming stronger?

A: Well, it's part due to the Islamists. The radical Islamists are out of luck. The radical Islamists have been marginalized and sent packing and they have been engaged in active coup plotting against these guys in power. The guys that are there now are small, nasty sorts, some of whom use the pretense of radical Islam if they think it's going to help them get through the day. But they're basically a bunch of discredited, brutal, ruthless characters that are fighting for their survival and loathe legitimacy. In that sense I think that probably, over the long haul, they're vulnerable.

Q: Are they getting support from other Islamic countries?

A: They've got the solidarity of the Arab world largely because the U.S. prestige and position in the world has collapsed on account of Iraq. I mean, the biggest benefit that Khartoum has is Iraq and the decline of U.S. prestige and legitimacy in the world.

Q: Especially as the honest broker?

A: Yes, as an honest broker. You know, if you can paint the U.S. as engaged in some kind of errant, violent and preemptive regime change strategy directed against a Muslim population of the Middle East that resonates. In part, declining U.S. influence over Khartoum is attributable to our mistakes as a government in other places. If we had not launched this catastrophic war in Iraq, we would be in a much stronger position vis-à-vis Khartoum.

Q: Do you think U.S. policy in Iraq is affecting the CPA implementation specifically?

A: Sure. Khartoum can snub its nose. Look what happened there with the Security Council resolution yesterday. You think we're going to succeed in the resolution? I think China, Russia and Khartoum are going to stuff it to us once again. The reason they're stuffing us is because we're weak and with low legitimacy. We're despised by a very large part of the world, not because of what we're doing in Sudan but because of what we have done in Iraq. Our leverage in Sudan is grossly diminished. It's not, as some would say, all a lack of political will, and that Khartoum is so much smarter than we are, and we misjudged, and blah, blah, blah. The bigger picture is that we're paying a

huge price in our Sudan policy because of the disabilities that we've brought upon ourselves through Iraq. That's the hard lesson. And there's not much getting around it.

Q: So is the way of getting around it to re-engage our Norwegian, British, Swiss, Italian friends to step up?

A: Maybe. I mean, you can make an argument that the CPA will kind of muddle through, even as Darfur remains in crisis. But as long as Darfur is in crisis, everything is somewhat up in the air. If you make that argument, then you would say that until we get compromise with the Chinese, until we get a UN force into Darfur, until we can end the cross border provisioning of the SLA and the JEM (Justice and Equality Movement), and until we can force Khartoum to garrison or disarm the Janjaweed and bring them under control and permit the entry of a robust human force, everything will be somewhat in question. I think you can make that argument. I mean I'm not prepared to make the argument that we should just throw up our hands and say okay, Darfur is just impossible. I mean, I don't subscribe to the utopian options that many float around this town that we're going to send U.S. troops in to save the day in Darfur. It isn't going to happen. But with the price we're paying today and our inability to move Darfur is the price of Iraq and the fact that the agenda is so damned crowded with Lebanon, Gaza, North Korea and Iran. There's not much left. We've lost Zoellick. We've lost Danforth. We've lost Charlie Snyder. Ranneberger is now in Nairobi. There are no adults left in the building to run the Sudan policy. And if you leave it strictly to junior level AID (Agency for International Development) officers, that's what you're going to get. The policy's just kind of disappeared. It's kind of sad because I think the Bush administration deserves a lot of credit for what they did. You know, we would never have gotten the CPA or the DPA (Darfur Peace Agreement) without the likes of Danforth and Zoellick, and the President standing behind this, and the Secretary standing behind this even against harsh and poorly thought out criticism coming on the constituencies.

Q: The constituencies are still out there?

A: Oh yes, they're out there, and they're very important to sustaining U.S. engagement. The President wouldn't care as much were it not for the constituencies. Congress would not care as much for the same reason. So it's a good thing that they're mobilized and generally they keep people focused on the right subjects but sometimes it gets a little lunatic, you know, goofy.

Q: So our European allies just walked away from this or are they still engaged? I think there's a Norwegian who's heading the evaluations committee?

A: Tom Vraalsen, a former Norwegian ambassador. Tom Vraalsen's very good. The Norwegians are serious, the Brits are serious.

Q: This is great. May I use your name as a referral, that I got your name, that I've interviewed you?

A: Sure.

Q: Many thanks for all.