

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

**Interview #24 –Executive Summary**

*Interviewed by: W. Haven North*  
*Initial interview date: October 4, 2006*  
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The interviewee foresees the South as seceding, mainly for two reasons: the Government of the North is taking few or no actions to convince the South that they (the North) are truly open to unity of the country. Secondly, given the long history of misunderstanding, and the current open “window” for the South to have their own country, the South is unlikely to let the opportunity pass.

The overall approach to the CPA was flawed because it failed to take into account the need for a truly comprehensive plan for the entire country, and tended to treat each conflict separately. It also failed to identify the best interlocutors for the peace process negotiations.

Underlying problems remain, before unity and peace can be achieved: good governance is an elusive concept and not yet realized; also, a comprehensive vision for the unity of the country has not yet been adequately articulated.

Elections should have preceded the peace negotiations so as to produce a representative democracy for the Sudanese people. As it stands, there exist two dictatorships instead of one representative government.

Lessons learned are the following:

In ethnically divided and fractured countries such as Sudan, a comprehensive plan of action is imperative;

Where it exists, bad governance is the root problem and must be addressed directly;

When peace agreements are being negotiated, it is best to hold elections before the agreements are finalized.

For Sudan, recommended future steps are to find partners to democratize the country and push for good governance, and also to help organize a constitutional conference.

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*Q: Let us start by reviewing your association with Sudan and how long and particularly with the CPA (Comprehensive Peace Agreement).*

A: I was born and brought up in Sudan and I moved to the U.S. around eight years ago. So I spent most of my adult life in the country. And there I have been involved in the political debate in the country, whether through media or through gatherings or associations.

*Q: Which part of the country were you from?*

A: Khartoum mainly.

*Q: What is your understanding of how the CPA process got underway, the beginning of the negotiations and the arrangements?*

A: Back in 2003, the overall approach to peace in Sudan was flawed; it is not a comprehensive peace plan for the entire country and so it treats each conflict separately. That is really not reflective of the situation in the country, especially when all these warring parties have different alliances and they keep shifting them back and forth all the time.

*Q: Can you elaborate on the different parties and who they are?*

A: People always say this is the North versus the South. If you go and look at it, each one of these blocks has members of the other block. You have Northern Sudanese in leading positions in the SPLM (Sudan People's Liberation Movement) like Monsal Hallad and Yassir Arman and others and then you have Southern Sudanese in the North in the Sudan Government, if we are talking today you have Lam Akol, the foreign minister and Mashar was there for awhile and other members of the military council that was ruling at the beginning of this government. So they have always taken Southern Sudanese and put them in the Central Government in the North like Paulino Matiep, the leader of so-called friendly forces? And these are forces that are working in the South, but fighting the SPLM and being trained and paid for by the Sudan Government. So when you say this is the North versus South or Arabs versus Christians, it is really not true. So there is a need to first define the conflict and to see it closely to be able to come up with a solution.

*Q: There are other groups as well that were not included?*

A: Yes. In the peace process itself that is the other issue. So, in addition to the lack of a comprehensive peace, the approach to peace is also lacking in terms of who deserves to be invited to the peace talks. Mediators just looked and said, we have a powerful Islamic government in the North, we have a powerful Southern rebel movement in the South, these are the two partners that we need to bring together to solve the problem. There were many calls asking people involved in these talks in Kenya to include others, like the opposition in the North, the National Democratic Alliance members, or even the friendly forces in the South and people in Darfur, the people in the East. But either the mediators were not forceful or the partners themselves, Sudan Government and the rebels, were not willing to give some of the cake to the others.

*Q: Why do you think that they were not included?*

A: They were looked at as not having proven themselves as powerful; people did not think of power as power to cause problems. They thought of it as power to govern, and so these two groups were powerful because they are dominant. Instead the approach should have been to include everybody, because even if you are not powerful enough to govern, you could be powerful enough to cause problems.

*Q: But the North and the South did not want them included?*

A: They did not want them. I heard reports that the Sudan Government insisted on not having them, then obviously the SPLM did not want to figure out what the friendly forces are going to do and how they are going to fit in a possible autonomous South.

*Q: You talk about a comprehensive peace plan, could you elaborate on that and what would be its main features?*

A: The underlying issue is governance. Instead of inviting all members, all political forces to a constitutional conference to sit together with the U.S.-led mediators pressing them, and coming up with an agreement to share everything at once and then push for an agreement, what happened was: let us fix the South/North issue. Once that was “fixed,” it turned out that Darfur is now a problem for the peace talks, because you cannot have just one vice president. So you are solving the situation in the South, but that solution has turned into a problem for Darfur. This would have been avoided had there been a comprehensive vision to bring all parties together, divide all the jobs or positions and all the wealth and power so the whole country could share the country’s wealth and power and then work together.

*Q: Were there efforts to bring something like that about?*

A: When the CPA was worked on, people were saying okay, that is fine; these things are going to happen later. And, of course, elections were planned in the middle of the six-year term. This is another problem: I believe elections should have taken place as early as possible, so you could really give the people of Sudan a chance to choose their representatives. The Government in the North has toppled a democracy, and in the South the late John Garang was known for his dictatorial attitudes. The bottom line is there were really no free elections for the people in the South. So you are entrusting dictatorships to make peace in the country, instead of pushing first

for elections, choosing true representatives of the country, and then bringing them together to make peace.

*Q: Let us go back to the CPA itself. Were you aware of the negotiation process and how it worked and the actual coming to an agreement?*

A: It also did not work well because until very recently, the peace partners, the Sudan Government and the SPLM, have still been quarreling over the formation of the committees that are supposed to enforce the agreements. It has taken so long to enforce these agreements that the wasted time has impacted on the effectiveness of the CPA agreement.

*Q: Were you aware of how they reached the preliminary agreement on these four or five commissions or protocols?*

A: They did on some. On the wealth sharing, the SPLM is still critical of the fact that they were not given full access to the country's wealth, especially the oil money that is coming in. I am not sure how transparent the Government is on revenues received. And then the issue of the national capital is still unresolved because of the two different opinions of each party.

*Q: Do you have any impression or information on how they went about the CPA negotiations and who led and what the procedures were?*

A: Obviously all these rounds of talks took place in Naivasha and Nairobi, in Kenya and Abuja. It just took so many years to arrive at the point where they wanted to go ahead and sign a peace treaty.

*Q: What about the role of the international community? Was it helpful or not?*

A: It was helpful in terms of putting pressure on the central government in the North. It was not helpful in failing to address that the Northern Sudanese are not a united front, and that their government is not a legitimate government. So it gives the impression that the international community is siding more with the South and really not looking at the North to see how the Government is torturing people in ghost houses and imprisoning people and cutting hands and legs. You do read these reports but they do not reflect the situation; whenever it comes to the peace process then it is "the North," nobody goes there and tries to figure out what this North consists of.

Sudan has a relatively impressive history of democracy. The country tried three times to establish a democracy and succeeded twice in two unprecedented times, when complete civil disobedience brought a dictatorship to its knees. This is something people tend to overlook. The country actually could be the fairest African, maybe even Middle Eastern country, as it sent a woman to parliament in free elections in 1964. So people in Sudan are savvy, though it is still a tribal society. There are so many restrictions, so many loyalties, but there has always been this push for democracy and people believed in it. It should have gotten much more credit, especially when we look on where credit goes right now. Compare this to Lebanon, where people just went one or two days and demonstrated, and Syria left the country. In Sudan we did that in '64, we did it in '85, completely brought the government down because everybody did not want to go to

war. Nobody died; there was no blood. Every time a dictatorship comes back, at the same time, there is always power and push for democracy that topples these governments.

*Q: Could this happen again?*

A: I am not sure; right now this government is probably going to just disintegrate from within.

*Q: Elections are coming up. Do you think those will work?*

A: Those would not necessarily work. The government owns the country and the resources. It is not going to allow people the time to organize; it has a powerful propaganda machine to convince people to vote for them. But it would be a good start. The government might get some votes, maybe the majority. But if the opposition parties, the traditional parties, organize themselves a little bit, which is something that is really problematic on their part, then they could at least put some people in parliament despite possible election problems and fraud.

*Q: Is there anything the international community can do to help facilitate or move the election process and move back to democracy?*

A: Most of the pressure on the Government of Sudan should also include democratization. Part of the problem is that the opposition, especially in the North, has always been fractured and weak. So this would also take efforts from the Sudan opposition parties to stand up and work together. The ideal situation would be an emergence of a more modern party. The problem is people, so many people in Sudan, they just look at the Government, they see it as too corrupt and too fundamentalist and they look at the opposition and they see it as too archaic, too sectarian and just very ineffective. They get lost and they do not have an option.

*Q: Is any group monitoring the CPA agreement?*

A: The UN is involved because it has forces in the South, and obviously the U.S. is too, as the major peace broker.

*Q: And then there is the Assessment Commission. Do you know how that is working?*

A: The problem is, like in the Abyei protocol, there was this plan that came up where both parties said okay, go ahead and survey the situation and let us know what is going on. Then when they came up with a report saying Abyei should belong to the South, the Government in the North said no, we are not adhering to your conclusion. So there are these issues of violations of implementation, willingness to implement in the first place.

*Q: A referendum is coming up. How do you think that is going to work out?*

A: I think the South is going to secede. And I see that because of two major things. First, there are indications that the North, the Government in the North, is not doing everything it can to convince people in the South that they are really open to unity. Second, there is this long history of misunderstanding and this is an opportunity for the Southern leaders to have their own country. I do not think they will pass up on it. There was this expectation, especially before Garang's death, that Garang was going to be the new force for reform in both the South and the

North. In the first the three weeks when he was first vice president there was just this outpouring of sympathy and admiration from people in the North. People there told me that had he run for president he would have won easily over anybody in the entire country.

So now you have his successor who is rumored to be preferring secession over unity, and right now the Government in the South is just not doing anything; it is just doing little things but looking and observing instead of engaging in a democratic transformation for the entire country. They are just waiting for the referendum to happen and then tell the political forces in the North that hey, we gave you 60 years, you did not want us to be united, you took all the resources, you did not develop the South, so we are not going to vote for unity.

*Q: How will these other parties you spoke about in the East and West be related to this referendum?*

A: It is going to depend on the results, of course. But I do not see the ruling Congress Party as being diminished drastically in a way that would make it irrelevant politically.

*Q: We are interested in is getting some lessons we have learned so far from this experience. What stands out for you? What things that should have been done or should not have been done?*

A: There are three: number one, have a comprehensive approach to the fractured and ethnically divided countries with problems like Sudan; number two, address the root problem, which is bad governance; and number three, push first for elections before finalizing a peace agreement.

*Q: On the second one, you talked about dealing with bad governance, what steps are needed to address that?*

A: Elections would help, but strengthening of civil society organizations would be key.

*Q: Is something being done on that by the international community?*

A: Not enough in my judgment.

*Q: In both the South and the North?*

A: In the North, in particular.

*Q: Is there anything on the constitutional review process?*

A: The issue is that the Government in the North is really using the constitution for political reasons. And when we say the Muslim North fighting the Christian South, it implies that just because they are all Muslim, then they should agree to what the Government, what form of Islam the Government is thinking and what form of constitution. And that is not true. The vast majority of Muslims in the North wanted a secular government; they do not want religion to dominate. Some want to be religious on their own, but they do not want religion to be part of the political process.

*Q: And is there anything that the international community can do to move things along?*

A: The international community needs to find partners in the North.

*Q: Partners to do what?*

A: Partners to democratize the country and push for good governance.

*Q: And you talked about needing a comprehensive plan. Who would develop such a plan or is that something the international community could help promote?*

A: The international community can help organize a conference; let us call it a constitutional conference; it would facilitate this conference and all parties would be invited. And then representatives of the international community would put together, after consultation with these groups, an agenda and then all the parties would work on it; it should be a simple, to the point agenda.

*Q: Do you think the North and South governments would be willing to consider something like that?*

A: It has been floated as an idea, actually; it almost happened before this last coup. I am not sure if the Central Government would sign on it, but with international pressure it could.