

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

Interview # 61 - Executive Summary

Interviewed by: Dan Whitman

Initial interview date: November 7, 2006

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The interviewee is a Khartoum-based journalist, who visited the U.S. in 2006 in a State Department sponsored International Visitors Program. The respondent experienced the CPA peace process as an observer, covering it in his articles and op ed columns from Khartoum and Naivasha.

The interviewee sees the process as b basically determined by two sides, the Khartoum government and the SPLM/SPLA. Both were tinged with a wish to maintain the military solution, and were drawn to the peace negotiation process by the international community, including Senator John Danforth and the IGAD. What began as an effort to resolve the Nuba mountains issue ended up as a more general peace agreement.

Ceasefires were disrupted during the negotiations process, but ultimately the negotiations prevailed despite skirmishes intended to derail the process. The side requiring more concessions was the South, because the South is neglected by the Khartoum regime and needed a leg up to level the playing field. The differences between the two sides were mainly social.

The interviewee, though a resident of Khartoum and ethnically attached to the Khartoum government, is actively involved in creating a civil society movement to impose accountability on the regime in the North.

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Q: You are a journalist, a press journalist, in Sudan. I believe you were present during part of the moments in Nairobi when some of the negotiations were going on. What was your own personal connection is to the North-South talks? I don't mean politically, but at what points were you able to observe the process?

A: Yes, I'm writing a daily column, it's an opinion column and you have to be in contact, close contact, with most of the issues, big issues in Sudan. One of them is the crisis of Southern Sudan or the war between the North and the South in Sudan. I used to write about this almost every week, at least, during the last twenty years, because it's a very big problem and I used to address this problem continuously. Before the start of this negotiation, I used to write that the negotiation route is not accessible right now because both of the parties, the government and SPLM, they are just playing with trying negotiations. When they go to negotiations, it is not an expression of good will. They just want to convince the other party that they are willing for peace but they are relying on the military, far more than negotiations.

Q: Are you talking about what you saw ten years ago, leading up to 2005?

A: I'm talking about 2002, when they both came from Sudan to start the negotiations. The beginning of these negotiations go back more than ten years, from Addis Ababa to Abuja to Naivasha, moving all over. Ten years before they started in Kenya, they've been negotiating for at least ten years, if not more than that.

Q: Are you saying that you think they did not want the process to work?

A: At the beginning, yes. All of them relied on the military solution, because they thought that they could solve this problem militarily.

Q: At one point you said "the two parties" and then you said "all the parties." Maybe you can tell us who you think were the main parties, other than the official ones. There were other ones, I think, involved in the process. Tell us who they were.

A: Yes, two main parties, the Government of Sudan and the SPLM/SPLA, which was led by the late John Garang. But there are small parties, organizations, political parties in the North and very small southern parties, but they are not influential enough, they cannot

influence the situation in the South, these small parties.

Q: Do you think that they were adequately represented or were they really just standing in the wings or what is your feeling about these factions? Were they important, were they neglected?

A: They are very small. They are not capable of changing the situation in Sudan.

Q: Do you think that they actually slowed down the process?

A: Yes, if they were included in the peace process, they would slow down the process. I asked this question of the ambassador of Sudan, “Why not include these parties in the peace process?” He said, “They would slow it down because they will not influence the negotiation and if they are included they will raise so many other problems which complicate the agreement.”

Q: Let's talk about the agreement itself. How do you remember the formulation of the agreement? How do you see what's in the agreement and how did the process affect the parties to that agreement?

A: If we start with October 2002, when the special negotiator of the United States, John Danforth, he came to Khartoum and he started with the first round not by addressing the problem in the South but in the Nuba Mountains. The Nuba Mountains, which is just a small part of the problem, in between the North and South. So he concentrated at the beginning, when he started, the first three months, he concentrated on this. We asked him, “Why this? It's just a small problem. We have the war in the South. That's more important than this small Nuba Mountains issue.” He said, “Because it is easier here to reach, to see the value of this place, easier to reach a peace agreement in this place. So let us start here and then move to the other, difficult places.” So within three months we managed to make the first peace agreement in the Nuba Mountains. We signed the agreement in Switzerland, in Geneva. Began in October, in January we signed this peace agreement in the Nuba Mountains.

Afterwards we started the negotiations in Nairobi to get to a ceasefire in these areas. We managed after four months, in July 2002 they signed what we call the Machakos Protocol, which was the first attempt to reach a settlement, because in that protocol we agreed on three major points. The first one, the relations between civilians and the state, the other one the boundaries of the South and the third one is

Q: You've described how Danforth began the process with a small, with a certain aspect of the larger problem. Your judgment of that? Do you feel that that was the most effective way to get the process going that led to the CPA?

A: Yes, I do think it's a very practical way. At that time I followed it day by day. It was very practical and very productive. At the beginning it starts very slowly. There were so many problems and I think the government is just waiting. The plan we do think is trying

to serve the military situation of the SPLM in that area, because the government was thinking that the military situation for the government is better than the SPLM's in that area at that time. So we were suspecting that he may just want to serve the army of the SPLM in that area. But I do think when they signed that agreement in the Nuba Mountains it was a great motivation to go towards the real problem.

Q: So it was a good way to go about it. Tell us a little bit, then, get us from the Nuba Mountain accord over to February of 2005. It was a staged process. Tell us how you remember the various stages.

A: So the first step was the Machakos protocol in July. After that the great problem between the two parties who later agreed, one of them tried to capture a very important city in the South, the SPLM tried to get that city. So the government stopped the negotiation and said they will try first to get back that city. So that halted negotiations for three months at least, from July up to October.

Q: Is there some way that the CPA process could have done better in making the three months a shorter time? Was it simply a military conflict?

A: Yes, at that time, because we know both parties, they were very busy, probably in that time they do think that they have enough firepower to prevail militarily so they were just aiming at that city. I told you it's a very important city for the government.

Q: Okay and then after that three-month halt, take us through the next period.

A: After three months when we came back to the negotiation again, before continuing the negotiation we signed a ceasefire agreement in October 2002. When we restarted negotiations, the first point for us at that time was the security issue, to make the ceasefire sustainable. So they managed to sign the third protocol of this agreement. It was signed before November 2002, which was the security arrangements protocol, how to continue the ceasefire agreement.

The next one was the oil sharing protocol. This was signed in January 2003. So they just divided, the first fifty per cent to the North and fifty per cent for the South.

After that they signed the last agreement, which was the power sharing. Seats for each one, so 52 per cent to the National Congress Party and 28 per cent for the SPLM and the rest between the oppositions in the North and the South.

Q: Now, during the process some commissions were set up, commissions is the term, part of the implementation of the CPA. Can you tell us what you remember of the creation of those commissions and what were they? Were you an observer of the creation of those commissions?

A: Yes, I was there at that time, when they signed the agreement. I went there two times. I was there in the final stages of trying to conclude the agreement before signing

it. So I remember those days. Sometimes I thought they're not going to conclude the final agreement because everyone is trying to insist on his own solutions.

Q: It seemed like it was not going to happen. In your view, what was it that made it possible?

A: You know the most important explanation for this solution was the pressure from the international community, because more than eleven countries were there, they were inside the compass of the negotiations at Naivasha, inside the negotiation, including the United States. The outside pressure made the process work, for sure.

Q: Let's talk about the successes and the failures. Talk about the process, the creation of the structure itself, how it works, the commissions and also the implementation. But let's take it in order. Was it, how would you characterize the successes? You said outside pressure. You said that starting with the smaller issues. Is there anything else that comes to mind about what successes there were in this process?

A: I think the most successful side of the CPA was because it addressed the roots of the problem, that is, not only the problem of the war, while not completely responding to that security problem or the crisis. If we start looking for the roots of the problem between North and South and try to solve that problem, we must give the South more attention and trying to restore the texture of relations between the North and the South.

Q: You say the roots of the problem. What would you say are the roots of the problem? Some people think the roots are military. What is your judgment?

A: You know, the roots of the problem, before the North and the South, they were not equal, at least socially, from the beginning of political relations and for so many that's still the case. And the South is completely ignored by the North and they just look at the South as almost a different country, it's not the South Sudan. It's completely ignored by the Government.

Q: So the root of the problem is social?

A: Yes, it's social, but outside of that it's also a political survival.

Q: In a perfect world, how would this be made good? If the root of the problem is social, what's the solution to that?

A: The solution is more integration between the South and North. That will not happen unless the people themselves, they have more education, more health care, more infrastructure.