

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

**Interview # 67 – Executive Summary**

*Interviewed by: Sam Westgate  
Initial Interview Date: March 8, 2007  
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The interviewee was a former official of an international NGO working in Northern Sudan early in this decade. At times he chaired a committee of six international NGOs that followed the CPA negotiations and prepared reports on humanitarian concerns in Sudan, particularly in the South.

The informant noted that in the early 2000s the central Sudanese government was very skilled at playing one political faction against the other in terms of negotiating the CPA and not just in the context of the North-South divide. In fact, the traditional North-South divide has skewed understanding of the political geography of Sudan, since it ignores East-West concerns, and particularly those of Darfur. Most of the divisions -- ethnic, religious, social, and political -- in fact mask the underlying desire for economic fairness in the distribution of revenues from oil production. In this regard, the settlement of border issues and the ultimate fate of Abyei are critical in establishing a durable peace.

According to the interviewee IGAD, although it did not have much “weight,” played an important role in bringing the CPA process to a signing ceremony. Of the IGAD countries, Kenya as host to the talks was the most significant “enabler.” Eritrea sometimes contributed positively, but most of the time it did not. Egypt and Libya, while sometimes helping the negotiations, also played negative roles. In terms of the international non-African negotiators, the observer did not note significant differences in their positions. He found the U.S. to be an honest broker, and attended regularly U.S. delegation briefings on the CPA process.

The observer noted that the international NGO community in Sudan was very circumscribed in what it could do or say. They could do research and file reports, mainly of a humanitarian nature, but they had to be very careful about overtly political issues. The risk for espousing a political position was being declared *persona non grata*. Sensitive issues had to be quietly addressed with Sudanese interlocutors.

In terms of implementing the CPA, the interviewee is pessimistic. The structures are simply not in place, and skilled manpower is lacking. Equitable distribution of wealth and a satisfactory resolution of the Abyei issue are still distant goals. And Darfur continues to loom as a human tragedy, which distracts the country from solving its political, economic, social, and religious problems.

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*Q: You were present in Khartoum, while negotiations were going on for the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, known as the CPA. At what stage did you start following the negotiating process, if you followed it at all? I assume you did.*

A: Yes, I did. As I said, I started in Khartoum in about August of 2002. Obviously there had been already negotiations before. But I basically arrived sort of in the middle of that, and even though I had to find my feet a little bit, being the director of a large international NGO, I certainly realized the importance of what was happening at various places. I tried to follow as much as I could, and really from that moment on, I tried to at least keep myself abreast of developments.

*Q: In this regard, did you operate with your organization, in a team-like atmosphere in terms of covering the negotiations? Were there others with you that were following and tracking the process?*

A: I have to explain a little bit the set-up of my NGO, because I was responsible for its operations in what was then, or still is, basically, Northern Sudan and I had a counterpart to that, which still exists, based in Nairobi who was in fact responsible for our operations in Southern Sudan. So what we basically had to do was to figure out some kind of way to share information with each other. But not only that, we were part of a consortium of six international agencies, among them IRC, Oxfam was there, Save UK was there, Tear Fund, and CARE.

As part that consortium, which had in fact a representative based at that particular moment, a sort of a coordinator, if you will, based in Nairobi, from a policy perspective, she followed actually the conversations a lot closer. And I do know that at times she had access also to some of the negotiation teams and that information was also channeled basically to us. And in addition to that and perhaps as a last point, we together, as this group of agencies, agreed, it was difficult to work together as six agencies together, but we agreed to undertake also some kind of research into the situation of Southern Sudan, specifically from a humanitarian perspective, to basically use that as a tool to say to the government, “look, what’s happening at this point is extremely important. The cost, the human cost, of continued conflict is enormous.” And we tried to spell that out basically in policy option papers.

*Q: While you were there, were you following the U.S. objectives during the negotiations?*

A: I tried to but I did not have access, direct access, to that negotiation team. As I am sure you know, some of the things were guarded quite well I think, guarded in the sense of confidential meetings taking place, etc. Things would come out of the talks every now and then. I was not fully aware of the ins and outs of basic negotiation positions. I did not know that.

*Q: In your consortium of NGOs, did you come up with specific instructions or guidelines to help you in terms of lobbying for certain points of view, the humanitarian concerns that were the highest for you. Was it organized in such a way that you had talking points and other kinds of briefing papers at your disposal?*

A: Yes, to a certain extent. Especially, for me, in the Northern Sudan context, working in an external environment which I should say was not the most enlightened, perhaps, in the world and quite repressive, it was not necessarily easy to engage in those kinds of conversations. There was a perception that we would be political and that, a perception by the government that we would be political or I would be political and that it was not necessarily or still is not necessarily being appreciated and in fact that is not really our mandate. So for me particularly it was not necessarily so easy. Maybe for my colleagues in Southern Sudan at the time it was a little bit easier than for me, specifically because of the external environment.

*Q: Maybe you can describe for us the most significant Sudanese parties at these talks at the time that you were in Sudan. What were the Sudanese parties and their points of view?*

A: Sudanese parties?

*Q: In the sense of the individuals or groups that were obviously giving input into the negotiations, among the Sudanese themselves. Obviously there was the government position or positions. Can you kind of sketch for us the political environment among Sudanese groups and even prominent individuals?*

A: Well, maybe a little bit but, again, being in north Sudan, in Khartoum at the time, there were huge, huge sensitivities. Anything that relates to policy and advocacy was very, very difficult.

*Q: Can you give us a sense of the environment, of the kind of political environment, that you saw? In other words, you clearly had a North-South divide, religiously, ethnically.*

A: Yes, again, as a representative of an international agency, all those things that you mentioned, political, ethnic, religion and what not, obviously they are involved in the kind of programs that you do and our reading of the situation was that really within the Sudanese government and this continues up to today, there are a few people who basically call the shots and we also have to ask people, not necessarily directly, engaging

with representatives of the Sudanese government, acting more indirectly, working through local organizations and maybe organizations of civil society. That is something that we did. When first we arrived, what I found was that you see the government was very, very, very good at playing off different interests, one group against another.

*Q: What were these groups that were being played? If you want to keep your remarks to Northern Sudan, that is fine. What groups were being played against one another?*

A: Even when you look at the map of Sudan and again, even to the present day, there are certain areas in the country, especially the areas where there is a lot of oil, which obviously are extremely important. So it is very important that you have personal access to those people who control strategically those resources, because it is actually a very important bargaining chip. And I cannot say who those people exactly are because I did not have that access. But that is actually an example where certain interests are that clearly are of great importance to representatives of north Sudan.

I am sure that somehow those interests were being used in the negotiations but again I cannot see exactly what or who those people were or what exactly they were using as bargaining chips. That is why of course you have of course political power that is being put on the table, you have economic power that is put on the table. There are certain issues about representation that are put on the table and in the end of course all those interests, somehow they are being broached or they are being reflected to a certain extent in of course that final document that we have. But how exactly that thrust was run, I do not know.

And then last but not least you have of course also external interests in Sudan. Let us face it, Sudan is currently one of I think ten economic potential sources in the world and all the multiple riches are being concentrated in Khartoum's fate. That is very important for the powers of the world. So who knows what was actually discussed and in the end, how this played out in a concrete way. I do not really know.

*Q: Can you identify the significant differences, both in the North and the South? Can you tell us about which parties, as an informed observer, were playing a constructive role and which ones were playing either a destructive role or the role of a spoiler in the negotiations.*

A: Well, I think certainly to start with, if I broadly can put it like that, of the international community....

*Q: Before getting to the international community, can we discuss the Sudanese themselves? Which groups were, in your view, playing a constructive role and which ones either delaying or were actively trying to undermine any future agreement at that point.*

A: That is a very good question and also it is very complicated for me to answer, because I do not necessarily have that inside information. I can give one example of at least

somebody who I know played a constructive role and it was for instance the former [Southern Sudanese] minister in the early Seventies in Sudan, Abel Alier, who was a very respected elder statesman. Evidently he is very well known and I do know, because we had some contact actually with him, that he played a very positive facilitative role in keeping people at the table. So that is one example I can give.

*Q: Now let's turn a bit to the international organizations. In this case not the NGO community, that will be a separate question. But specifically if you had observations on the roles that IGAD and the UN, the EU or even the African Union or the Organization of African Unity, depending on what time we are talking about, what roles did they have in bringing these negotiations to a close?*

A: Well IGAD has been involved in trying to start peace in Sudan for a long, long time. We also know that IGAD does not have much weight. At one point that war might have been ended. But certainly Museveni was involved and played an important role in convening meetings and having people around the table. So as for perhaps the 2002-2003 effort, IGAD became more important and more accepted, with support from all kinds of actors at meetings, from the U.S. to the UN. In the end everybody put substantive pressure on all the different parties not to abandon the talks but to keep talking, despite the great differences. Having followed those conversations certainly at one point, I did not think they were going to go anywhere. But then for whatever reason, with whatever sticks or carrots people were using, which I obviously do not know, still progress was being maintained, which in the end resulted in the Machakos agreement.

So I would say, this whole list you mentioned, to varying degrees I think they all played their roles, somehow. And even though I saw that, again, I am not able really to pick out exactly who did what or how things advanced, except they played I think a positive role because there was certainly a degree of unity, if you will, amongst all the different parties that it was important to end this longstanding conflict. So I think in the end it was being perceived as quite positive.

*Q: And did you note how the U.S. delegation, how it related to these international organizations?*

A: No, I did not follow that, really. The only interaction that I had, I remember somebody from the U.S. delegation came through Khartoum for instance, when he was in Khartoum, obviously he always had a meeting with the NGOs. But, other than that, no, I did not really follow that.

*Q: That leads to my next question, which is, what role, who would you say were the most significant of the NGOs and the religious groups that were involved in putting forward their points of view on the North-South conflict and its resolution?*

A: I can in fact only speak to a certain extent for my NGO and then since I was part of this NGO consortium and actually was at points in time during my tenure in Sudan the chair of the NGO forum, we did try to put our arguments across, mainly from a

humanitarian perspective, the necessity really to end the conflict and the impact that it has had on the lives of the ordinary Sudanese. That has always been our language. We did it before, as a collective viewpoint, as a representative of CARE, as a member of this consortium and in the chair of this NGO forum, which as I said I chaired several times during my tenure.

*Q: And how about the religious groups, the international religious representation? Were they quite active, do you think, in putting pressure on the various parties to come to an agreement?*

A: I have no clear evidence of that.

*Q: Christian organizations, Muslim organizations, I guess the animists have...*

A: Obviously, the one thing that of course was sort of a red flag through all of it was where in the end do active interests really come from and what is the power of various groups and states over certain people in the administration to push for a certain agenda. That was the common thought that I have.

*Q: Now maybe you could describe the role of the regional states surrounding Sudan. Did you see them, their activities, as furthering the peace process? You mentioned Kenya a bit already.*

A: Kenya I think is a good example of an enabler, in a way, although again with none of those parties I personally really interacted, had dealings with. That was really not my role but certainly in the media certain countries were positively mentioned, other countries were negatively mentioned.

*Q: Which ones were positively mentioned and which ones were negatively mentioned?*

A: Well the positively mentioned one certainly was Kenya and more as an example of an enabler. Sudan has nine countries around it. Libya had a dual role, sometimes positive, sometimes negative. Egypt of course with its sharing of natural resources of specific interest in Sudan. Negative at times I think, Uganda. So it is a little bit of a mixed bag.

*Q: And how about Eritrea and Ethiopia? Where would you put them in terms of being enablers?*

A: Eritrea, variable, at times enabling but most of the time not necessarily so and Ethiopia certainly not an enabler.

*Q: Now if we could move to the roles of the major powers. Could you describe, either in general or specifically, the roles of the UK, Norway and the U.S., when you were observing the negotiations?*

A: They were very influential, the three of them, because they were part of the Friends of IGAD. So, for sure, positive but I do have to mention something, because while this was going on you had a whole developing situation in Darfur and I think it is very important to raise that because certainly, nearly all the powers played a quite ambiguous role. On the one hand, they were very concerned about the developing peace agreement in the South, not wanting to jeopardize that, and not jeopardizing that cancelled by inaction in the path of the developing humanitarian, political crisis in Darfur. I have seen that very first hand because I was the chair of the NGO forum several times.

We did it rotationally, several times for periods of six months in a row, and I had been there four years, so at several times I had direct access. I was the representative to go, together with another colleague of the NGO community, representative in ambassadorial meetings, because we had a seat basically at the table. And it was clear to me that not because perhaps people did not want to act but it was a very difficult situation, to balance between those two very complex processes at the same time.

*Q: What was the critical stage, do you feel, in this process, or the critical problems that had to be solved?*

A: The things of course that were on the table from the very beginning, with Sudan, it was like in other agreements, about the sharing of resources, political power, the status for instance of Abyei, which today is not resolved. But there were a couple of things that were very, very important. Again, I saw things from afar and I saw things either because they appeared in the public domain or because people were talking about it basically independently in Khartoum, where I was.

*Q: What were the challenges that you felt the NGO community had in terms of communicating their points of view? And points of view, not just humanitarian but also political. You have mentioned political divisions. There were religious divisions. There were divisions concerning resources. How did the NGO community that you were representing get its points of view forward? Like issues of self-determination for the South, for example. Did you try to engage in any way to communicate political points of view?*

A: We had to do that in very informal ways, usually without attribution. For me in the beginning, that was very difficult because of the environment that I had to operate in. I had to run a large NGO. A direct security risk for me, if I were seen to be speaking out politically, I would have been PNG'd.

*Q: Did your consortium of NGOs take specifically political stands of any sort, or did you try to represent certain kinds of views?*

A: A couple of times, what we did concretely, when delegations sometimes visited Khartoum for instance or Nairobi for that matter, although I can not really speak for Nairobi, but when delegations visited we had opportunities to say what we wanted to say

to those delegations, as I said, usually without attribution. And I know of at least two times, although I was not party to that, we sought out a meeting with the chief negotiator.

*Q: Which chief negotiator?*

A: General Sumbeiywo. So we did that. But again, it was difficult to put our viewpoints across, because there were certain risks associated with it.

*Q: In hindsight, if you could have changed any of the policies or practices of the U.S. in the negotiation, what should have been done differently?*

A: Good question, again. To what extent in the end there really had been true ownership through all parties, and to what extent over two years or whatever, we are more than two years of the CPA and we still see bickering over all kinds of things. Very little progress, really, in terms of direct progress for a period or direct benefit.

*Q: What about the actual negotiations, prior to 2005, leading up to the agreement? Do you have any criticism of the U.S. style and approach in negotiation?*

A: From what I was able to observe, what was admirable was that in the end, despite certain political differences were reconciled between the members of the international community, including the U.S. and then some of the other countries you mentioned such as Norway and others. I think there was, from what I could observe, quite a unified front, and I think that has been probably a very, very critical element in the formula for success, they call it success, of the talks, because that is critical, obviously and I think that has been very positive. How in the end that was achieved I do not really know but you could see that from the outside. So I think that is very positive.

*Q: Do you think that the U.S. or even some of the international players could have engaged earlier and more effectively in the process? Would this have led to an earlier conclusion?*

A: I am not sure, really, because in the end, of course, the Sudanese are the key players and really, would they have been ready? Years ago there were many, many, many attempts and they failed for whatever kind of reason. So the time, again, for whatever reason the time was not absolutely right, perhaps and no matter how you look at it you should know that, there were efforts before. I think what was critical was, I should have mentioned it earlier, the fact that President Bush appointed Senator Danforth and he took a very, very, very pragmatic, open and transparent approach with authorities in the North and in the South, and it was demonstrated I think by very practical improvements in the security situation in a crucial part of the country, the Nuba Mountains, the dividing point between the North and the South. T

hat was a very strategic, perhaps the most strategic, part of the entire process, because if that would not have happened and if in the end the collective would not have been able to show some semblance of, perhaps not peace, immediately but a ceasefire that was being



respected and was being enforced by the UN. So that was a pivotal moment in the entire process and that is what one needs. One needs in the end dedicated attention by people who know the area, who are sensitive to all the players, the different sides to the equation, and then in the end an effort is being made but something, even though it is little, something is being felt by the people on the ground and that was important.

*Q: In October of 2002 the U.S. Congress passed the Sudan Peace Act. Do you think that had an impact on the negotiations?*

A: Yes, I think so, because it demonstrated to the Sudanese authorities that the U.S. is serious, that there are all kinds of looming things, including sanctions, which are still on the table and what not. If certain bodies are behind certain acts that are being passed and that are being monitored, that sends a certain message to authorities and no doubt that was a stick that in the end was used.

*Q: If we could turn now to implementation, can you describe for us the primary shortfalls in the CPA that have led to problems with implementation? What are the primary shortfalls or defects of the CPA?*

A: I think the translation of an incredibly complex agreement into workable structures, for one. Committees that are supposed to be set up, that are supposed to do something, ranging from security to overseeing how natural resources are being divided, etc.

That is an incredibly complex process and, let us face it, especially the southern Sudanese government, they do not really have the skilled manpower, up to today, to fill all the positions that they need to fill to transform a guerilla movement in a very short period of time into a workable administration.

That all briefly shows certain levels of mixture probably between individuals and groups that still are there, profits for them up front and in the end, because that is the key thing, in the end, the benefits for the people of Sudan. You can certainly question whether peace benefits have been reaped by them or not. And I think that is also related to the incredibly complex systems that were supposed to be put in place for channeling of resources that in the end groups like NGOs or local groups can access to implement some of the humanitarian and the development work. So those are all elements that to date I think are working against implementation.

Which is not to say progress is not being made, because I was actually in South Sudan two weeks ago, all the way in the north of South Sudan, in a forgotten place somewhere and yet, even though administration really is not there, people have nothing really to work with in terms of funds for instance that should perhaps have been put at their disposal by the central government. The one thing that is there now, the guns are not audible. There is no overt conflict. So there is movement of people, even though there are still some issues, especially around Malakal and things have not been necessarily all resolved, because of militia leaders that are still not incorporated into the army. That was positive. I can not say that the people of South Sudan have benefited very well.

*Q: Is there anything in the current circumstances in Sudan that could not have been foreseen by the agreement as it was concluded? Are there certain new developments that work against the CPA and its implementation?*

A: Yes, I think so. I mentioned Darfur. It is a huge issue and it has direct link I think in the ability of the government to focus, whichever government you're talking about, North or South. It is as if somebody is continuously pulling at the seams of the clothes that you are wearing. It is interesting, because when you look at Sudan -- and I think that it is something that the international community also is party to -- Sudan is often looked at either as the land being a North-South issue, which I think is completely wrong, or very rarely. It is such a complex country, very rarely a more holistic view is taken. And I do not know whether that is because we as human beings cannot think holistically or view issues holistically but there is no question in my mind that what is beginning to happen in the east of the country; there are issues there as well and what is being played out in the west of the country, as in Darfur, it is all related in the end.

*Q: It is all related to the problems of the South?*

A: Yes, it is. I do not think what could have been foreseen is the magnitude for instance of this problem of Darfur, because initially this was not a problem when I was there. When the whole problem started, people were still thinking that this was something that could have been, the government would deal with in no time, and then it blew up at an unbelievable pace. Actually I think that was certainly not foreseen by anyone and it caught I think a lot of people certainly by surprise.

*Q: What lessons, or the most important lessons, do you think that can be learned from the negotiation of the CPA and its implementation?*

A: One thing I mentioned, this appointment for instance of people who have an understanding of the situation and are able to speak with much credibility about what maybe should be done and how things should be done. I cited the example of John Danforth. In the end, an incremental approach is taken, if you are dealing with such intractable, complicated issues, an incremental approach whereby at various stages concrete benefits are being seen and felt by the people in the country.

I mentioned for instance the ceasefire in the Nuba Mountains and how people became involved in negotiations, which showed that people were slowly but surely starting to regain a little bit their lives but again there was no fighting anymore. I think that is a very important thing and others were taking note. If you are able to keep your eyes on the bigger prize, so that you start slow, realize that the processes take an enormous amount of time and that it is very difficult to get people around the table who are of such opposing views and somehow work with a team who are able perhaps to bridge that gap. And I suspect that, to give an example, Abel Alier is one of the few people, even though he is a Southerner, he was the prime minister of the SPLM administration in the provinces and I think he is able to play that role. That is important.

Another thing that comes to mind is the failure of the key international actors, if you will, to really even agree on what the common points, you may differ politically on certain things but there must be common elements that whether you are Norwegian or you are Belgian or you are from Holland you agree on and that you put those key elements forward and you develop a common strategy. I think that is very important as well. I also think that certain pieces of legislation might speed the peace process.

*Q: Do you have any predictions of how either the upcoming elections or the vote for self-determination or secession or do you have any anticipation of what those results will be?*

A: Yes, I have no doubts in my mind that if the Sudanese are allowed to vote in transparency and without political interference, then certainly the Sudanese will vote for secession. I do not think there is enough reason to believe that in the end they will subject themselves to a Government of National Unity which in fact it is not promoting, because I do not think they are, really. I still think that despite Southern representation in the Government of National Unity, I just can not see how in such a short period of time the power structures and I am speaking mainly from a northern perspective, that those power structures are able to change their tune. And I think the man and woman in the street in Southern Sudan know that very well, and I am not very positive about where this will go.

*Q: One final question. Some of the other sticking points really in this agreement have been the sharing of oil resources and perhaps some other resources, and also border issues. Can you see any progress on either of these fronts?*

A: The file that talks about Abyei and Blue Nile and those three states, despite the recommendations of the commission, the file is stuck, and the offers by President Bashir have not moved a single inch. I remember the special representative appointed by the Secretary General for internally displaced people.

*Q: You are referring to a Francis Deng?*

A: Yeah, yeah, I met him twice and I remember very well a meeting that I attended also of the United Nations and was and he had just toured the country and seen what he had seen and he spoke at length about the special status of Abyei. Of course he is from there, but he said unless the issue of Abyei is resolved peacefully and to the satisfaction of all parties, we can have an agreement but there will not be real peace for Sudan. I have never forgotten that, and I think he is right. It is a lynch pin, in a way. It is a point that fits very uneasily between the North and the South and lots of the issues that play out at the bigger scale, they are there, at the local level. So that is certainly one thing.

And with regards to the distribution of wealth, I think it is also telling that this year at the anniversary of the CPA there was a public row between Bashir and Salva Kiir in Juba, when Salva Kiir raised the issue of money that was not forthcoming and Bashir said, “look, we gave you seven million” at that particular moment “so where has that money

gone?” So it is clear that those tensions have not been resolved and until really that is done, well, you may wonder how that is going to develop.

*Q: Do you have any final observations you would like to make about the CPA and specifically the role of the NGOs? Do you think that they were ultimately effective in helping to move the negotiations to the actual agreement?*

A: Well maybe not specifically the negotiations, but I think what did help was that there were concerted efforts in 2001, early 2002, really to push the human costs of continuing conflict and to put that squarely on the table. The research that we did collectively with those six NGOs, I think that was important, because it basically put a human face on the conflict. And I hope that maybe it helped to focus a little more the attention on the plight of the Sudanese people.

*Q: Thank you very much. This is certainly most appreciated.*