

Crisis at the Confluence: Religion, Humanity, and Conflict in Sudan

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ABSTRACT: *This study examines the complex intersection of religion, conflict, and humanitarian crisis in Sudan, highlighting the devastating impact on civilians, particularly vulnerable and marginalized populations. Through a critical analysis of historical, political, and socio-religious factors, the paper investigates the roots of the crisis, including the legacy of colonialism, Islamist governance, and ethnic tensions. The findings reveal widespread human rights abuses, forced displacement, and sectarian violence, exacerbated by international inaction and fragmented humanitarian responses. The study argues that, addressing the crisis in the Sudan requires a nuanced understanding of her complex religious landscape, inclusive dialogue, and coordinated international intervention. In conclusion, the paper suggests mitigation strategies that include the urgent need for a focus on promoting inter-faith understanding, strengthening humanitarian laws, and supporting locally led peace initiatives.*

KEYWORDS: *Animism; Sudanization policy; Sharia; viper's nest; Arabization; Plebiscite; Referendum; Multinationals; Muslim Hegemony.*

INTRODUCTION

The conflict in Darfur is an ongoing and unending one. It has now degenerated into a contest between the "Janjaweed", a government-supported militia recruited from local Arab tribes, and the non-Arab peoples of the North African region. Most of the Arabs are mainly black, going by a narrow definition of the term. Thus, many scholars tend to rely more on the distinction between Arab and non-Arab in their analysis of the conflict. The mere fact that about 70% of the Sudanese live in the North, as opposed to 25% (Animists) and 5% Christians who live in the South, tends to legitimize the north-south dichotomy. In the same vein, the Muslim and non-Muslim (Christian and Animists) competition argument can be made.

However, some other scholars attribute the cause of the conflict mainly to the competition between sedentary farmers and nomadic cattle herders for control of scarce resources – arable farming land and water resources. Others see it as one driven by racial motivation. The conflict in the Sudan is a very complex one. There are colonial, racial, religious, and regional dimensions to it. The gravity of the conflict has led many humanitarian agencies and international organizations to characterize it as "ethnic cleansing" or "genocide." According to the United Nations' estimates, about 180,000 people have died in the past 2 years of the conflict, while more than 1.8 million people have been permanently displaced, with a large portion of that number having fled to neighboring Chad.

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This paper discusses the religious dimensions of the current conflict in the Darfur region of the Sudan. It also traces the historical background of Sudan's colonial status as a condominium under British and Egyptian control from 1898 to 1956, when it was granted political independence. Further analyses focuses on the British "Northernization" policy (also referred to as the "Sudanization" policy) before Sudan's independence in 1956, and how this policy handed over political, economic and bureaucratic power to Northern Arab Muslim descendants (Jellaba) who pursued mechanized farming policy in the Sudan after consolidating economic, political and bureaucratic power in the contemporary Sudan; how this power grabbing practice has been used to displace and oppress Southern pastoralists, Christians and animists; and how the predominantly Muslim north used religious-oriented laws, indoctrination, institutional discrimination and violence to persecute and marginalize minority Christians in the south.

Furthermore, this study explores the Islamic/ Sharia policies of General Abboud (1958 -1964); Col. Mohammed Jaa'far Nimeiri (1969 – 1985) and the challenge posed by Col. John Garang; Sadiq al-Mahdi (1985 – 1989); and Omar Hassan Al-Bashir (1993 – Present). Next, the consequence of the sudden death of Col. John Garang in a helicopter crash on the fragile power-sharing peace agreement signed in January 2004, and its aftermath, are analyzed. Next, the study explores the Bush policy in the Sudan that operated under the auspices of the IGAD group and observes that the withdrawal of the Sudan from the Machakos Protocol dealt a devastating blow to the American initiative. The paper concludes that the Obama administration was not able to involve American troops in Sudan over Darfur, unless on limited basis like instituting and enforcing a no-fly zone policy either unilaterally or under the auspices of the United Nations or NATO; and how domestic political and economic constraints, including the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Israeli invasion of Gaza and the India-Pakistan conflict over the terrorist attacks in Mumbai dictate America's limited involvement in Darfur.

DEMOGRAPHY AND GOVERNMENT

The Sudan is the largest country in Africa. It has a population of about 40 million. Located in North Africa, it is a poor country with an external debt of \$ 21 billion (2004 estimates). It shares its borders with Egypt, Chad, Libya, Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire), and Uganda. Therefore, the porous nature of the Sudan gives us some insight into the kinds of transnational problems it will encounter and the sources of its problems – arms smuggling, currency trafficking, trafficking in humans, international terrorism, etc. No wonder Osama Bin Laden settled there before his departure to Afghanistan. Its environment is equally harsh, characterized by periodic drought, soil erosion, dust storms, and the threats of desertification.

According to the Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress (2004), the Sudanese ethnic groups include Blacks who make up about 52%, Arabs/39%,

and others/ 9% (including foreigners). With respect to religion, 70% are Sunni Muslims, most of whom live in the North. Those with indigenous beliefs (Animists) make up about 25%. These traditional African religious followers primarily worship rocks, shrines, and other sacred objects. Christians who make up about 5% of the population mainly reside in the South and Khartoum, the state capital. The official language of the Sudan is Arabic. This is the language of the courts, business, legislation, education, official broadcasts, and the banks. English is Lingua Franca (language of conversation.) The Sudan gained its independence from Egypt and Great Britain (UK) on January 1, 1956. Before this date, it was a condominium, a territory jointly governed by two or more states. The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, as it was previously referred to, remained under the joint control of Great Britain and Egypt between 1889 and 1956.

In the words of Gerhard von Glahn (1996), "condominiums", under international law are not regarded as members of the community of nations; play no active part in international relations, have no governments of their own, and do not possess any vestige of national sovereignty. The regime of the Sudan has always revolved around one or a mixture of military, theocracy/ Sharia styles, which espouse an Islamic platform. One of the majority political parties in the Sudan is the Sudan People's Liberation Movement. This is the party in which Col. John Garang was a leading member. The others are the Ummar Party of Sadi al-Mahdi, the Democratic Unionist Party, and the Democratic Alliance Party.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE CRISIS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

In 1898, a coalition of British and Egyptian forces overthrew the Mahdist from power and conquered the Sudan. Thereafter, Britain and Egypt set up a condominium with a capitalist orientation. Before the Sudan's independence in 1956, Britain pursued a policy of "Sudanization". This policy of "Sudanization" is used interchangeably with the policy of "Northernization." This policy saw British colonial administrators replaced by northerners (Sunni Muslims) who comprised the majority population at the time of handover of power to indigenous Sudanese.

The Center for African Alternatives, United Kingdom, estimates that out of 800 administrative posts, only four were allocated to Southerners. Control of the economy and administration thus came under the perpetual grip and control of the Muslim North. In response to this regional imbalance and marginalization, a coup was staged by Southerners at the military garrison at Torit in 1955. This incident, in effect, marked the beginning of the "Anyanya" separatist movement that fought the Sudan's civil war for almost two decades. It should be noted that Anyanya was a southern Sudanese separatist movement that emerged during the period between 1955 and 1972 to create a free and self-determined South Sudan that would free the people of Southern Sudan from what they viewed as "Arab Colonialism" to assert their cultural, religious, and linguistic identity.

As post-independence power resided with the "Jellaba" (descendants of Arab traders), history had it that during the slave trade era, the Jellaba, who were

Arab Muslims from the North, were responsible for enslaving black Africans in the south. This historic cleavage and resentment gave impetus to fierce southern resistance to Islam and the embrace of Christianity as an alternative. Southerners in the Sudan saw Christianity as being on their side in the struggle against Northern oppression. Hence, the traditional chiefs in the South did everything in their power to fight against the encroachment of Islam. They saw the penetration of Islam in the South as an attempt by their arch enemies (Arabs) to subjugate them and as a threat to their survival. Eventually, the resistance and fight against Islam took on a new meaning, embracing Christian Missionary activities and the use of English instead of Arabic, the official language, as a medium of instruction and communication by choice.

With the consolidation of economic and bureaucratic power, the Jellaba moved away from the pump-irrigation system of agriculture (cotton schemes) of the 1950s to large-scale mechanized farming of economic crops: sesame, cotton, groundnuts, millet, maize, and cotton from the eastern Sudan into the Darfur region. Large-scale private schemes took over great stretches of traditional farmlands and herding routes, and displaced millions of small producers. Large areas of forests were also forcibly acquired, without compensation, thereby clearing the way for large agricultural schemes and settlements, which displaced nomads from the best or most desirable areas of their traditional pastures. This greed for land grabbing, with all impunity, dealt a lasting blow to traditional peasant farming. The subsequent destruction of peasant and pastoral societies forced the poor southern farmers to wander into the cities and thus helped to swell the number of urban poor.

As the displaced southern peasants migrated into the cities, they were treated as undesirables- beggars and criminals. Brutal acts against the traditional cultivators and pastoralists were swift. Victims of famine and drought who moved into "wet zones" for survival were intercepted by the army. These helpless, poor, and displaced peasant farmers had no choice but to move into towns and cities, relief centers, to beg, do petty jobs, hope on charity and handouts, and in some cases, steal or engage in prostitution to survive. Worse still, homeless victims of the displacement called "Shamasa" were rounded up in police raids called "Kasha." These raids were the collective aftereffects of the Islamic/ Sharia policies of the regimes of General Abdoud (1958), Colonel Mohammed Jaa 'fer Nimeiri (1983), and Sadiq-al-Mahdi (1985).

TOWARD AN ISLAMIC HEGEMONY

The Sudan may be accurately described as a complex and multi-religious society. Yet, Islam remains dominant over other minority religions, mainly practiced by the black southern Sudanese who refuse to recognize the supremacy of Islam. Ethnic and religious diversity has generated a fierce resistance in the form of civil war against the Islamic state of the Sudan. Indeed, the self-government statute of 1953, as well as Sudan's constitution, which was promulgated in April 1973,

guaranteed freedom of religion. But, in practice, it is a different story as the minority religions are disadvantaged.

Based on strict enforcement of dress codes, the compulsory study of the Quran, and discrimination against non-Arab speaking Sudanese, Islamic fundamentalists, under the aegis of the National Islamic Front (NIF), have advanced the cause of Islam through educational institutions and government. The effort at "Islamization" of the Sudan is most dramatic and equally felt in the South, where Muslims are in the minority but can practice their religion without regard to other minority religions through the support of government institutions and policy. This has been done through the codification of Islamic law known as Sharia. Under Sharia, it is a crime to break Islamic codes.

Strict application of Sharia also makes it a crime to practice other religions outside Islam. There are reports that in certain occasions, non-Muslim judges have been moved from the South to areas of the country where they have been assigned low-level assignments such as traffic court duties. In contrast, several new judges with strong affiliation to the NIF have not only retained their jobs, but have been transferred to high visible judicial appointments, even though they have little or no legal education.

In actuality, the constitution and other enabling legislation have been manipulated by the Sudanese authorities to confer supremacy to Islam to the detriment of other inferior religions. According to the U.S. Department of State (1994), the constitution of the Sudan states that "all persons shall enjoy the freedom of faith and the right to perform religious rites within the limits of morality, public order, and health as required by law."

The Sudanese Criminal Act of 1991 incorporated Sharia (also spelled Shari'ah) into the criminal code of the Sudan. The Act also makes the abandonment of or defection from Islam punishable by flogging and, where possible, by death. Under the provisions of this edict, Islamic sects are allowed to perform religious rites and crusades designed to convert prisoners and possibly the Sudanese Christians to Islam. Even abandoned and/ or missing children whose parents' whereabouts are unknown are considered Muslims and can only be adopted by Muslims. Other provisions of the act consist of the administration of harsh penalties for alcohol production, consumption, and abuse, and strict conformity of women to proper attire and apparel in public places. There is also a prohibition against certain strands of interfaith marriages. For example, a male Muslim may be allowed to marry a non-Muslim, but a marriage between a Christian male and a Muslim female is forbidden.

The Missionary Societies Act of 1957 requires the immediate registration of all churches in the Sudan. Under the provisions of the Act, all non-governmental agencies are required to register with the Ministry of Social Planning, which has the discretion to reject or accept any application and registration statuses of any churches that want to operate in the Sudan. The Minister in charge of Social Planning can, under the provisions of the decree, dissolve any churches whose

registration applications are denied within 90 days of such rejection. This is another device whereby the Islamic-dominated state of the Sudan exerts control and influence over minority religions and practices.

The Missionary Societies Act of 1957 posed a stumbling block to an unfettered worship of diverse religions by non-Muslims. Under the provisions of the Act, the government of the Sudan could deny Christian and other non-Muslim faiths permits to build new churches. Additionally, under the guise of this law, stringent requirements for licensing missionary groups to operate in the country, as well as the issuance of work permits for foreign missionaries, have been relaxed. Based on the provisions of the Act, the Sudanese government has been able to indoctrinate military trainees, pressure prisoners to embrace Islam for the benefit of a general amnesty, and, in some instances, withhold food assistance, welfare services, and humanitarian aid to non-Muslims unless they convert to Islam. The revocation of the missionary Act of 1962 in the fall of 1994 by executive order did not make any difference, as the Act was only in the book as a mere slogan. But the free exercise of religion in the Sudan is just rhetorical because it is not enforced, despite its existence in the books.

Religious indoctrination became a common practice in the Sudan. African Christians and Animist children, who are overwhelmingly the inhabitants of the Southern Sudan, are targets of ongoing ethnic and cultural cleansing by the Islamic government of Sudan. According to the 1995 survey by the Catholic World Report, the Sudanese government has engaged in a practice of snatching the Sudanese Christian children from public places and then detaining them in government camps.

Contrary to the official Sudanese government claim that the camps are designed to provide food, shelter, and vocational training to vagrant children, the camps are known to have forced the children from their parents to military camps, where they are given military training, indoctrinated, and persuaded to convert to Islam, assume Muslim names, and quote and study the Koran daily. Violence against women became a common occurrence. The News Network International, in its 1993 and 1994 reports, chronicled several incidents of violence against Christians in the Sudan. Included in the reports are cases in which Muslim fighters in the war theaters (War zones) rape and torture Christian southerners. In other cases, government agents withhold medical care, food, clothing, and other services from refugees, mostly southern animists and other members of minority religions, unless they convert to Islam. Other practices include the burning down of non-Islamic churches in predominantly Christian areas of the Southern Sudan, stoning of Christians without fear of retribution, and assaulting catholic nuns, priests, and pastors.

Other examples of severe persecution suffered by Christians at the hands of the Islamic-dominated State are in the areas of employment and housing discrimination. There is overwhelming evidence that black Christian school leavers are unable to secure employment, as opposed to their Muslim counterparts, who

receive multiple job offers upon graduation. In some other situations, the Sudanese Christians, more than Muslims, are subjected to more rental scrutiny and discrimination as most Muslim landlords, especially in choice areas of Khartoum, the capital city, refuse to rent to them or even ask for years of rent in advance.

POST-INDEPENDENCE REGIMES AND POLICIES

After independence on January 1, 1956, General Abboud (1958 – 1964) seized power and ruled the Sudan from 1958 to 1966. He pursued the policy of “Arabization” and was deposed in 1964. The Sudan then experienced a period of instability between 1966 and 1968, as its search for a peaceful and stable regime became elusive. In its place were a series of caretaker, transitional, or provisional governments with no good handle of things, until Col. Jaa Nimeiri (1969 – 1985) seized power in 1969 and declared an Islamic state with its policies based on Sharia/ Islamic Law. This law was characterized by amputations, stoning, and public floggings for breaking the law by fornication and stealing. Pressure from resistance movements in the South forced Nimeiri to the negotiating table.

Hence, the Addis Ababa Accord was negotiated. The agreement was named after the Ethiopian Capital, Addis Ababa, which served as its venue. The accord gave regional autonomy to the South to end the civil war. However, Nimeiri betrayed this accord when he redrew the southern borders to include the Bentiu region, where oil was found in the North in 1983. Under Nimeiri, several failed mutinies took place. The most notable was the one at the garrison of Bor, in which the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), led by Col. John Garang, found expression. Col. John Garang believed in a national constitutional conference to agree on a secular and democratic constitution for the Sudan. Col. Garang was killed in a plane crash as the Vice President of a Unity Government.

Sadiq al-Mahdi (1985-1989) succeeded Nimeiri as the leader of the Ummah party and Prime Minister. Al-Mardi signed the Koka Dam agreement in Ethiopia in March 1986. The agreement outlined the formula and framework for a lasting peace in Sudan, including the convening of a constitutional conference. However, Mahdi abandoned the Koka Dam agreement and pursued the military option against the Southern resistance. In January 2004, John Garang and Bashir signed a power-sharing peace agreement in Kenya. The agreement culminated in John Garang being sworn in as Vice President of the Sudan. Following the death of Garang in a helicopter crash in August 2005, another Southern rebel commander and close confidant of Garang, Salva Kiir Mayardit, was chosen as Garang’s successor.

In 1993, Omar Hassan Al-Bashir assumed leadership of the Sudan. As the current President of the Sudan, Al-Bashir imposed Sharia and the harsh new Criminal Act. Upon ascending the throne, he immediately declared a state of national emergency and suspended the constitution. He is now reeling from the disturbances caused by the sudden and suspicious death of Col. Garang, his first

and former Vice President in a Unity government. With the selection of Salva Mayardit as the successor of the late Col. Garang, and Al-Bashir's new Vice President, Sudan's experiment in nation-building and political consolidation continues.

CONTEMPORARY SUDANESE- AMERICAN RELATIONS

The Clinton Administration did not perceive Khartoum as a friend of the United States, especially after the American representative to the United Nations, Madeline Albright, referred to the Sudan as a "viper's nest" of terrorism in May 1996. Thereafter, the United States relocated its embassy to Nairobi, Kenya, after its closure in Khartoum in February 1996. Other unfriendly events followed, including Washington's imposition of sanctions after the National Islamic Front (NIF) led a coup in 1989. In August 1993, the United States placed the Sudan on the list of states that officially sponsor terrorism and supported the United Nations sanctions on the Sudan in April 1996. Although these actions instituted under the Clinton Administration did not completely weaken the Sudan, they nevertheless contributed to the increased isolationism of Khartoum. The climax of the hostility toward the United States became paramount in August 1998, when the Clinton Administration mistakenly bombed the El Shifa Pharmaceutical manufacturing plant in Khartoum. The United States had claimed that the plant was involved in the manufacture of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD).

The trouble in the Sudan poses a special strategic foreign policy challenge to American foreign policy. In fact, the report by Francis M. Deng and J. Stephen Morrison (2001) enumerates some of the reasons why the resolution of conflict in Sudan matters to U.S. foreign policy makers. Some of the reasons highlighted by the authors is the moral outrage raised by the war in the Sudan which has not only claimed millions of innocent lives but has displaced millions of persons, destroyed the physical and moral fabrics of this Islamic society, as well as destroyed humanitarian relief sites and networks, promoted slavery, violence, torture and violence and the massive abduction of women and children into perpetual servitude. Furthermore, the support of terrorism by the regime during the 1990s not only threatened American interests and personnel overseas but became the source of regional instability which serves as haven that make for fertile ground for terrorist recruitment and operations that threaten the security of North Africa, the Middle East and the trouble region of the horn of Africa, including American friends and allies such as Egypt, Kenya and Morocco.

Also, with the increased prospect of Sudan emerging as a significant oil producer and exporter, because of new exploration and finds, the potential for increased mass civilian displacements and human rights abuses is likely to grow. A destabilization of the Sudan is expected to trigger the intervention of new emerging regional and global powers such as China, Malaysia, India, and Canada, with a growing appetite for oil energy, as well as other emerging powers such as Sweden, France, Qatar, and Australia whose energy corporations and other

multinationals need the interventions of their nations of origin for protection. On the other hand, if, with the assistance of the United States and other Western countries, the conflict in the Sudan is amicably resolved, earnings from Sudan's oil may be diverted from fueling conflicts to nation-building. Eventually, this new development will make the Sudan a new source of oil supply to the United States. This result is long-awaited by the international community because anything short of this outcome will be undesirable and unacceptable, given the realities on the ground, with respect to the Sudan: increased oil output revenues have become the new elements that have changed the asymmetry of power, by shifting the balance of military power in favor of the government of Khartoum. With the increased potential of the Sudanese national government to wage war against the opposition, the tendency towards a quagmire appears real.

Finally, as Deng and Morrison noted, there are global implications to the way the religious conflagrations in Sudan are handled, given the fact that many non-Islamic nations of the world, such as the United States and France, have large Islamic populations. Also, several African states remain highly sensitive to religious and racial policies and trends in the Sudan. As the researchers noted, "the Sudan can provide either a constructive link between Africa and the Middle East or a point of confrontation that has destabilizing consequences for both regions." The researchers believe that the United States has the capacity to bring about a lasting solution to the problem in the Sudan based on the fact that the Sudan will likely boast of the United States as a significant strategic and business ally as well as to maintain the flow of humanitarian assistance estimated to be over \$100 million a year that is given by the United States to the Sudan. The question, in their honest opinion, on how to achieve this lofty goal, is not necessarily on capability but strategy. In the end, Deng and Morrison posited the following framework as the basis for the United States to achieve a lasting settlement to the Sudanese problem:

- a. Focus American foreign policy solely on how to end the war in the Sudan.
- b. Rely extensively on multilateral diplomatic talks/framework involving states that have oil interests and corporations engaged in the Sudan, such as Norway, the UK, and Sudan's neighbors.
- c. Build the new initiative on the previous agreement by the Sudanese government and the opposition to the declaration of principles as the basis of diplomacy.
- d. Insist on an interim agreement that guarantees a "one Sudan, and two Systems" formula that ensures a single Sudan with two viable self-governing democratic regions of the North and South.
- e. Employ inducements and pressures (carrot and stick) as instruments of persuading both sides (the national government and southern opposition) to commit in good faith and to participate in peace negotiations.
- f. Plan for a viable self-governing South, including the identification of future commitments and sources of external support, such as the United Nations, World

Bank, European Union, United Nations Development Program, and United States Agency for International Development.

- g. Assign priority in the negotiations to confidence-building measures such as cease fire, troop pullback, external monitors, north-south boundary demarcation, revenue-sharing formula for water rights, oil and mineral wealth, civilian and human rights observers, definition of residual central government powers, and peacekeepers.
- h. Resume whole operation of the U.S. Embassy in Khartoum
- i. Enter bilateral negotiation with Khartoum on terrorism
- j. Impose an international arms embargo on all parties to the conflict.
- k. Push for the lifting of UN Security Council sanctions once the requisite conditions for their lifting have been met.

The opportunities to implement the recommendations of the report by Deng and Morrison (2001) came in September 2001, thanks to the September 11th Terrorist attacks. Before this time, between 1991 and 1996, Sudan, under the leadership of President Omar al-Bashir's Sudan National Islamic Front, had provided a haven to Osama bin Laden. Even after the American military attacks against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces in Afghanistan, the government of the Sudan, in October 2001, issued a statement criticizing American military actions in Afghanistan.

From henceforth, the Sudan became a central preoccupation of American foreign policy under the Bush administration. This resulted in the appointment of Senator John Danforth as Special Envoy for peace in the Sudan in September 2001. His mandate was to explore the possibility of a constructive role for the United States in the peace process in the Sudan. Danforth perceived quite early that the war in Sudan was at an impasse and was therefore unwinnable. Thus, in his initial official statement, Danforth recognized the importance of the multilateral approach and framework for a lasting peace in Sudan. This, in essence, was construed as a tacit official endorsement of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) framework, which the Clinton Administration had endorsed.

Danforth had stated that "the effectiveness of American efforts for peace in the Sudan would depend on our communication and cooperation with other interested countries, including the European Union and countries neighboring Sudan, especially Egypt and Kenya." Pursuant to Danforth's official visit to the Sudan region, and in consultation with all the stakeholders, Danforth proposed four confidence-building measures to help sustain a viable peace process in Sudan. They included: (a) a ceasefire in the Nuba region to facilitate humanitarian relief efforts (b) the creation of Eminent Person Group to investigate slavery in the Sudan (c) the creation of "Days of Tranquility" to administer immunizations as well as provide relief assistance, and (d) an end to air bombing raids and attacks on defenseless civilians.

There have been several previous peace efforts designed to settle the Sudanese problem. They include: the Juba conference of 1947, the Khartoum

Round Table Conference of 1965, The Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972, The Koka Dam Declaration, The Carter Center Initiative, The Abuja peace process (1992 - 1993), The Egyptian- Libya Initiative of 2000, and the IGAD peace process which commenced in 2000 and appears to have been the most effective in narrowing down the differences between Khartoum and the Sudan People Liberation Movement/ Army (SPLM/A).

Nevertheless, IGAD fell short of resolving the Conflict in the Sudan because of certain salient factors. It was not until 1993 that the Heads of State of the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD) got involved. Their mediation attempts, with the participation and cooperation of the government of the Sudan and the SPLM/A, culminated in the signing of a series of six agreements that included: (1) The Protocol of Machakos, which was signed in Machakos, Kenya, on 20 July 2002. The agreement set forth the principles of governance, the structure of government, issues of self-determination, and religion. (2) The Protocol on Security Arrangement signed in Naivasha, Kenya on 25 September 2003. (3) The Protocol on Wealth-Sharing was signed in Naivasha, Kenya, on 7 January 2004. (4) The Protocol on Power-Sharing, signed in Naivasha, Kenya on 26 May 2004. (5) The Protocol on the Resolution of Conflict in Southern Kordofan/ Nuba Mountains and the Blue Nile States, signed in Naivasha, Kenya, on 26 May 2004. (6) The Protocol on the Resolution of Conflict in Abyei, signed in Naivasha, Kenya, on 26 May 2004.

With the above peace outlines, the IGAD process appeared to have secured the agreement of the principal parties to the conflict, including the SPLM/SPLA and the Government of the Sudan. Yet, some controversial areas of dispute remain unresolved on substantive and technical details. One of those areas of disagreement pertains to the Southern border of the Sudan, where there are disputed areas between the North and South. Here, there are located, marginalized groups within the northern Sudan who have been loyal supporters as well as fighters alongside the SPLM/SPLA for several years in the conflict. The disputed areas include the Abyei district in southern Kordofan, the Chali-yabus portion of Southern Blue Nile, the Hofrat en Nahas which forms part and parcel of the Southern Sudan as well as the southern Bank of the Bahr el Arab/ Kiir River.

For historical and cultural reasons, there is a strong argument that the Nuba Mountains and South Blue Nile are different and therefore could not be lumped as an integral part of the Southern Sudan. Thus, there is a strong case made that the inhabitants of these territories be given the choice to determine whether they should be part of South Kordofan or Bahr el Ghazal through a democratic process of plebiscite/ referendum. Another contentious technical issue confronting the IGAD peace talks concerned the issue of self-determination for the Southern Sudan. Specific issues subject to resolution include: the terms and conditions under which the South could remain an integral part of a united Sudan or not. Under what territorial status it could become – a federal state, autonomous region, a confederation, an independent sovereign state or a federal state.

Some of the territorial issues confronting the IGAD group have been the position of Egypt, a member of the IGAD Partner Forum and a strong ally of the United States and the West as well as a key player in the Middle East conflict. According to the United Nations Mission in the Sudan (UNMIS), Egypt has taken several strong positions on the Sudan question. First, about the Nile River, Egypt has tried to maintain Arab solidarity. Hence, it has tried to make sure that it has friendly countries throughout the Nile basin, and thus was not eager to have an independent southern Sudan that could not keep or honor the existing Nile River Agreement which it enjoys with the Sudan.

Next, Egypt has been very reluctant to agree to any settlement that would result in the dismemberment or dissolution of a fellow Arab State. Not only is the policy a contravention of Arab League treaty, of which it is a key member and signatory. Any support for the self-determination/ independence of the Southern Sudan not only contravenes Arab solidarity but violates the ethos of the Arab League at a time when Arab Unity is important given the Arab Israeli conflicts and American wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Furthermore, Egypt is not only an ally of the Sudan, but they share affinity as Moslem countries as well as share a common border.

The Egyptian position on the Sudan therefore raises some issues for American foreign policy toward the Sudan. One question is whether it is prudent for the United States to work in opposition to Egyptian policy given Egypt's crucial role as an ally of Israel, as well as its importance in helping resolve the Iraqi and Afghan conflicts where the United States is embroiled in a quagmire and looking for a way out.

The sole reasons for the withdrawal of the government of the Sudan from the IGAD peace talks and its eventual collapse were contained in a press release by the SPLM/A News Agency on September 3, 2002, in Nairobi, Kenya and signed by Samson Kwaje, the Commissioner for Information and Official Spokesperson for the SPLM/SPLA. According to the press release, the justification submitted by the Sudan to the IGAD group/ Secretariat for withdrawal, which of course, it disputed, by accusing Khartoum of not only an attempt to evade issues, but a pretext to abandon the talks entirely, included:

- (1) That the confederal nature of power-sharing arrangement pushed by the SPLM/SPLA was not in conformity with the Machakos Protocol.
- (2) That the IGAD group was wrong to allow the three areas of Abyei, Southern Blue Nile (Funj region) and Southern Kordofan (Nuba mountains) to be included in power sharing talks, because that was beyond the jurisdiction of IGAD, and that such areas should be under Islamic law.
- (3) SPLM's insistence that Khartoum remains neutral of Islamic law during the interim/ transitional period.
- (4) That the atmosphere surrounding the Machakos talks was not conducive given the escalation of military activities by the SPLM/SPLA forces.

With the official withdrawal of the national government of Sudan from the Machakos Protocol, which was signed on July 20, 2002, the international efforts towards a permanent settlement of the Sudanese conflict came to a grinding halt.

CONCLUSION

Contemporary history of the conflict in the Darfur region of the Sudan is nothing short of a convoluted mix of religious, cultural, historical and ethnic tensions that have made peace elusive or perhaps, complicated the prospect for a lasting peace. The Sudan was a condominium under the control of Britain and Egypt between 1898 and 1956. Before granting independence to the Sudan in 1956, the British transferred political, economic and bureaucratic power to Muslims in the north. This policy of Sudanization or Northernization in effect marginalized the South, with predominant Christian and animist presence. The consolidation of post-independence power enabled the Jellaba (descendants of Arab traders) to use this power to make a transition from traditional/ primitive irrigation to mechanized farming. This created the motivation for Arab farmers to confiscate arable farmlands belonging to Christians and animists in the South.

The displaced rural farmers and herds people who were displaced were again victims of Islamic/ Sharia law in the cities as they struggled for survival. For example, the displaced peasant farmers who engaged in prostitution and other petty crimes because of land acquisition policies of the "Jellaba" were rounded up in police raids called "kasha." Even the victims of famine and drought who moved into wet zones were not spared. To people in the Southern Sudan, Islamic religion and Northern Arabs are their twin natural enemies. Hence, Christianity in all its manifestation became their natural ally. Marginalization of Southern Christians and Animists eventually became the cornerstone of the regime policies of General Abboud, Col. Mohammed Jaa' far Nimeiri, Sadiq al-Mahdi and presently, Omar Hassan Al-Bashir.

Resistance to Islam by the South and the call for a secular and democratic constitution for the Sudan became the Platform of the Sudan people's Liberation Army (SPLA) headed by Col. John Garang. With SPLA fight against southern marginalization, and resistance to Northern/ Muslim hegemony, the national government has consistently been forced to the negotiating table. Each time, the negotiation has culminated in an agreement; and each time, the national government has reneged on its binding contract whenever it served its parochial interests. In other cases, the powers of the state have been used to confer supremacy to Islam at the expense of Christian and animist religions practiced primarily by non-Moslems of the southern Sudan. Examples are not far-fetched. For example, the government of the Sudan has relied on the provisions of the Missionary Societies Registration Act of 1957 to force all churches to register with the Ministry of Social Planning, as well as dissolve any church whose registration

application is denied. This is one instrument with which the Islamic Republic of the Sudan exerts its control over non-Moslem religions and practices.

Furthermore, the government of the Sudan has used the Missionary Societies Act of 1962 to deny Christian and other non-Moslem churches permits to grow and expand, as well as use licensing requirements and work permits to restrict the activities of non-Moslem churches and personnel. Also, the government has used indoctrination and the manipulation of welfare benefits to lure Christians and other people into converting to Islam. In 1983, Nimeiri redrew southern borders to carve out Bentiu region of the south, where oil was found in the North. This move contravened the Addis Ababa accord which he signed. The Addis Ababa accord gave regional autonomy to the south as a pre-condition for ending the civil war.

Moreover, Sadiq al-Mahdi who signed the Koka Dam agreement in March 1986 in Ethiopia back-pedaled on it, when he chose to prosecute the war against the south, instead of honoring the Koka Dam agreement, which set the groundwork for peace with the south, including the convening of a constitutional conference. Even, the imposition of Sharia and the suspension of the constitution by Omar Hassan Al-Bashir when he took overpower in 1993 were all policies consistent with the British policy of "Arabization" (Northernization). The Sudanese withdrawal from the IGAD peace talks, and more specifically, Machakos protocol was a blow to the peace process in the Sudan.

The administration of President George Bush Jr. was unable to make any serious progress on the Sudan in its waning days. The new United States President Barack Obama, who was sworn into Office on January 20, 2009, could not promote, continue as well as honor the footprints of the IGAD Group on the Sudan. However, going with the clues of the Obama foreign policy doctrine, which he espoused during the presidential primary election debates, interviews, and selected speeches, one would predict that his administration would support the IGAD donor group in raising necessary funds for humanitarian aid to Darfur. Furthermore, his administration would be expected to not only lead in contributing funds for Darfur but will support the immediate deployment of an international force to dismantle the Sudanese militias to protect civilians as well as facilitate an orderly delivery of humanitarian assistance to the civilian population in Darfur. However, the chance for an outright American intervention and occupation of the Sudan was far-fetched given the dire economic situation in America. The American financial position is complicated by domestic politics, including the pressures of the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, not even to mention the international crisis generated by Israeli interventions in Lebanon as well as the crisis between India and Pakistan because of terrorist attacks in Mumbai on November 27, 2008, as well as the consequent Israeli invasion of Gaza. The remaining mitigation strategy for resolving the Sudanese existential religious and humanitarian challenges should

be increased emphasis and focus on promoting inter-faith understanding, strengthening humanitarian laws, and supporting locally led peace initiatives.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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