A report of the Sudan InterAgency Reference Group

Canada’s Future Engagement in Sudan:
Diplomacy, Security, and Aid: Issues and Policy Options

September 2009

Introductory Note
The following issues and policy options were generated by participants at a Sudan InterAgency Reference Group/Sudan Task Force workshop convened by SIARG in Ottawa on September 17th, 2009. The workshop, funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, and held under the Chatham House Rule of non-attribution, produced a set of recommendations meant for consideration by the Canadian government as it engages with Sudan in the near- and medium-term.

The options contained in this report are based on four thematic areas: Canada’s diplomatic engagement, support for conflict resolution in Darfur, issues and trends in South Sudan and issues related to development and the Canadian International Development Agency. They respond to the current situation as understood by participating independent analysts and representatives of Canadian non-governmental organizations with perspectives of humanitarian relief operations, human rights and development partners within Sudanese civil society. They are distilled from a broad “whole-of-Sudan” perspective, while recognizing that priorities related to regions such as Darfur and South Sudan may differ according to the circumstances at the time.

This document is not a consensus document and not all participants officially endorse each of the individual policy recommendations. However, the recommendations do reflect the sense of the workshop that there is a need for Canada to strengthen its Sudan engagement in several key areas to meet growing challenges within the country and the region.

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What is SIARG?
The Sudan InterAgency Reference Group (SIARG) was formed in 1998 as a forum for Canadian agencies with programming on Sudan. Member programs include research, public education, peacebuilding and conflict resolution, policy dialogue, advocacy, and relief and development. SIARG takes a rights-based and humanitarian approach to the conflict in Sudan and coordinates joint initiatives by its members to help secure a peaceful, just and lasting resolution to the conflicts.
What is STF?
The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade has established a Task Force on Sudan (STF) at its headquarters in Ottawa. The STF was formed to coordinate Canada’s whole-of-government contribution to the pursuit of sustainable peace throughout Sudan.

Policy recommendations in four areas:

1. Diplomatic engagement

With the Government of Sudan (Khartoum):

Canada should maintain diplomatic pressure on the government in Khartoum to:
- Engage in finding a comprehensive peace in Darfur (more detail in the Darfur section below)
- Enable the full deployment of the African Union - United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID)
- Promote human rights and humanitarian responses throughout Sudan
- Act to deliver on its obligations under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA)
- End destabilizing regional behaviour

Without abandoning any of the above conditions for improved relations, and with the objective of gaining greater influence and leverage with the Government of Sudan, Canada should remain directly engaged with Khartoum but explore new diplomatic approaches to enabling more positive relations. In doing so, Canada should NOT, at this time, consider:
- Lifting its existing ban on all arms sales to Sudan
- Reversing its policy of not providing diplomatic assistance to Canadians seeking to do business in Sudan
- Engaging in any cooperative activities with the Sudanese intelligence services

Room for more positive engagement may lie in:
- Democratic development in Sudan, ie., continuing to offer technical assistance to legislatures in both North and South
- Support for multilateral processes of critical importance to the future of both North and South, such as the Nile Basin Initiative
- Support for the Darfur peace process
- A larger coordination role through the “Friends of UNAMID”
- A bilateral aid program

With the Government of South Sudan (Juba)

Canada's engagement with the Government of South Sudan should focus on:
- Capacity training in areas of governance including policy development and technical governance issues (more detail in the Southern Sudan section below)
- Preparation for possible independence of Southern Sudan
- Nile water issues vis-à-vis Egypt and other parts of Sudan
Discussion

Participants spoke often about the “strained” diplomatic relationship between Ottawa and Khartoum following the expulsion of a Canadian diplomat in 2007 and Canada’s long standing concerns about human rights issues, including the ongoing support for and engagement with the International Criminal Court since the indictment of Sudanese President Omar Al Bashir. Nevertheless, the Government of Sudan (GoS) is seeking ways of re-engaging, particularly on issues of trade. While Canada continues to work through multilateral agencies (particularly the United Nations) on issues related to Sudan, the time may be right for attempting to explore how to arrive at a more productive bilateral relationship between the two countries.

Several presenters focused on the various peace agreements and processes as areas of concern. While peace in Darfur remains elusive, it was felt that the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) has not lived up to expectations for the southern part of the country. Conflict continues in parts of Southern Sudan (around Malakal and Abyei) and there were questions about who is fostering these conflicts and what motivates them; disarmament and reintegration of militants remains weak; the CPA is not comprehensive enough and does not include other conflicts in Sudan, including Darfur; and democratization throughout Sudan has had mixed results.

On this last point, it was pointed out that security agencies remain intrusive in the North and that the Government of National Unity (GNU) is essentially controlled by the National Congress Party (NCP), while the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) has no real power outside the South. In the Government of South Sudan (GoSS), the SPLM has not transitioned into a political party but rather has remained largely a military organization. It was said that neither of the major parties is looking forward to the potential loss of control of their respective areas in the upcoming national elections. Nevertheless, participants urged Canada to use its expertise in elections and referenda to help Sudan transition to greater democracy.

Presenters spoke of the ongoing humanitarian crisis, which continues to challenge the security situation, particularly in “transitional areas” and Darfur. The UN has stepped in where non-governmental organizations have been expelled; however, there has been a reduction in quality of assistance, particularly in Darfur. As well, the absence of a regional security system means that the borders of all countries in the region are porous, and irredentist movements operate regionally causing instability, particularly in the South.

Food insecurity is endemic and there is a need to (re)build agricultural capacity in Sudan. The background paper for these discussions notes how there is potential for Sudan to become a bread basket for the Horn of Africa. Yet the UN Environment Program has warned that a demographic surge and climate change bring the potential for environmental disaster in parts of Sudan. Without timely and coordinated action, land and water control issues may rise once again to the level of major conflict.

There is also a persistent need to address resource sharing between Khartoum and the regions, particularly related to oil but also water. Throughout the country, civil society is underdeveloped and, as a consequence, democracy is weak. There are heavy constraints on the media particularly in the North.
2. Darfur: Support for conflict resolution

Canada should take a more central role in the search for peace in Darfur, specifically offering to:

- Strengthen negotiation capacity among rebel groups and other Darfur community leaders
- Facilitate development of a common front among groups in Darfur
- Build relations of trust between Darfur groups and Khartoum
- Bring Darfur Diaspora into the peace process
- Encourage wide participation in forging negotiation positions
- Strengthen international coordination of those working for peace

Canada should also:

- Engage China on investment and relations in Sudan
- Work to increase capacity of UNAMID to fulfill its mandate
- Increase pressure on GoS to make peace, including through targeted sanctions on the leadership of the NCP

Discussion

There was agreement about the need for a new model of peace, that the models being pursued include too few groups in Darfur (i.e., the militias) and not enough representation of Darfuri society. In the South, CPA implementation is struggling, for example, because it was an agreement only between warring parties, rather than an agreement that attempted to deal with grievances of a broader group of Sudanese. One model for conflict resolution that the group discussed is one that has been applied with some success to Burundi (details can be found at: http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1417&fuseaction=topics.item&news_id=44130).

Nonetheless, participants agreed that Darfur cannot be treated as a “stand alone” issue in Sudan. One participant pointed to the need for an approach that considers the “whole of Sudan” but that builds peace from the bottom up, with less emphasis on macro-level, international peace processes.

Participants urged better analysis of the causes of conflict and the needs of the communities before launching into a “western-style”, legalistic agreement like the CPA. Several participants encouraged that attention be given to economic opportunities for the inhabitants of Darfur in the future, including issues of land, land ownership, and water and natural resources.

More leverage could be used with China, Sudan’s largest strategic partner. The same Chinese state oil companies operating in partnership with the NCP in Sudan are investing heavily in Canada’s oil sands, for example. Canada should explore all options for pressuring the Chinese to work for peace in Sudan.

3. Southern Sudan: Issues and trends

Engagement with Southern Sudan should focus on the following:

- Support political processes that are inclusive
Ensuring a legitimate referendum process including:

- establishing who will vote, what threshold is needed to move toward independence, and what question is being asked
- preparing parties and Sudanese people for peace regardless of the outcome
- encouraging the GoSS and other actors to conduct conflict mapping, develop early warning systems, and engage in conflict prevention throughout Southern Sudan

Devolving power to the regions, e.g., local governments (through Local Governance Act)
- Local peacebuilding efforts between groups in the South, e.g., people-to-people initiatives
- Improving demobilization keeping in mind post-demobilization needs, e.g., jobs
- Establishing stronger mechanisms to monitor wealth sharing from the oil fields
- Supporting civil society’s capacity vis-à-vis elections and the referendum, including helping establish realistic expectations of the population
- Supporting reform of the police, particularly related to human rights issues
- Supporting policing and the rule of law by incorporating traditional forms of justice
- Continued commitment to livelihoods development and the humanitarian mission
- Ensuring that UNMIS is better prepared to protect civilians if violence breaks out, e.g., in Abyei as groups return to their traditional herding lands later in fall 2009
- Facilitating dissemination of the contents of the CPA throughout Sudan, particularly in Khartoum
- Taking a consistent position against the recruitment of child soldiers

Discussion

Participants were told that independence remains the expressed choice of much of the population of Southern Sudan but that, regardless of the outcome of the referendum in 2011, conditions for any type of smooth transition to unity or separation remain doubtful. There is nervous talk of a return to armed conflict throughout the South. There also are allegations of a new arms race in Southern Sudan and in the North.

Conflicts between tribal groups have recently moved beyond “cattle raiding” to more open and violent conflict. There are persistent questions about who is stirring up these conflicts, and to what end. The continued existence of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) operating in the South, for example, enables the GoS to make the case that Southern Sudan is incapable of maintaining security. There are allegations that the NCP is actively undermining the CPA and actively supporting the LRA.

40% of the budget of the GoSS is being directed to military spending in the South. There is alleged widespread corruption in the South, a lack of economic development, and public support for the GoSS is reportedly falling. At the same time, one presenter spoke of how coordinating the requirements of donors demands a lot of the capacity of GoSS, and that there should be a recognition that there are other efforts to governing that demand the GoSS's attention, e.g., development.

There are allegations by Southern Sudanese that disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs (DDR) have taken place along ethnic lines in order to weaken certain groups and strengthen others. UNMIS is not at capacity with just over 9,000 peacekeepers and, more importantly, lacks equipment and ability to protect the population.
Participants heard from presenters that the economy in Southern Sudan is unable to sustain an independent country, which is worrying given that 1.2 million people still need food aid in the South, and poverty remains endemic at about 90%. One acute problem is the over-reliance on oil revenues which are easily corruptible and “stolen”. As much as 98% of GoSS revenues are from oil. There are many southerners who remain concerned about the lack of transparency of the accounting process for revenues. Revenue is passed onto the government in Khartoum and then onto the GoSS, and the GoSS may not be getting its fair share.

4. CIDA: Issues related to development

General issues related to development:
- There needs to be a balanced approach vis-à-vis needs, and better research to establish needs
- There is a need for better donor-community coordination
- There is a need to remain committed to humanitarian mission in Darfur
- There should be local CSO involvement across programs - aid can be channeled towards community-based peacebuilding, reconciliation and addressing the root causes of conflict
- There needs to be a mapping of Sudanese CSOs including their priorities
- Displaced populations require continued support
- Land and land ownership remain issues throughout Sudan

Within CIDA's thematic foci (food security, economic growth, and children and youth):
- Maintain focus on youth vocational training, including transitional programming during period moving to peace
- Concentrate on demobilization of child soldiers and reintegration programs for youth
- Develop micro finance programs to support CIDA’s priorities
- Focus on health and nutrition
- Support programs skills development and entrepreneurship
- Help develop local markets and agricultural sustainability, e.g., seed banks

Additional issue related to CIDA:
- Support for governance and democratization, in particular support for Sudanese civil society and voter education related to the elections (2010) and referendum (2011)

Discussion
The Darfur region continues to experience a large humanitarian crisis. Over 2.7 million displaced people are residing in camps and depending largely on aid from the international community. A decrease in available aid could have devastating consequences on displaced populations.

One presenter stated that in public opinion research Southern Sudanese consistently identified the following three priorities for their own development: education, health services, and roads.

While the Joint Donor Team (JDT) has been effective in strengthening aid coordination in Southern
Sudan, several donors continue to operate bilaterally outside the JDT making coordination of aid directed at humanitarian delivery and poverty reduction programs challenging. As well, there was broad agreement that Sudan needs to diversify its economy away from a dependence on oil wealth in order to achieve more sustainable and equitable growth.

What development there is in the South does not appear to be credited to the work of the GoSS. Rather, INGOs, faith-based organizations, and community groups that are credited with leading successes. There is ongoing concern over corruption, tribalism, lack of jobs, and lack of payment for salaries with the GoSS. The GoSS has been credited with more openness, however, and improved promotion and protection of certain rights, particularly freedom of speech. It was also noted that the Southern Sudanese government seems to be more open to discussing governance issues than the GoS in Khartoum.

There was a desire among participants to add a pillar to CIDA's priorities and take an active role in promoting democratic participation and governance issues. There is a need for capacity building in policy development throughout Sudan, for example, and a desire to have CIDA support civil society voter education efforts, even in areas where ongoing conflicts make people difficult to reach.

The discussion of capacity-building for civil society organizations (CSOs) and the engagement with civil society in Sudan recognized that engagement with Sudanese CSOs should also go beyond being “election ready”. Civil society engagement should acknowledge that peace, beyond being a political result, is a public engagement requirement, especially for youth. Young people throughout Sudan should feel there is an advantage in nurturing and working for a culture of peace. CSO and NGO development related to peace is an end in itself since civil society institutions and organizations are important for democracy.

There was also a discussion of political parties and political leadership in Sudan. It was noted by one presenter that politics are closely tied to ethnic identity, and party leaders tend to be popular among “their” people. Several participants spoke of the need of investing in Sudanese civil society around issues related to monitoring governance issues and preparing the country (particularly the South) for the referendum in 2011.