Implementing the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Sudan

BY ANDREW NATSIOS

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed on January 9, 2005, has the potential to change Sudan’s future and lay the foundations for democracy and economic growth. By integrating groups that have been marginalized since Sudan’s independence in 1956, the CPA can bring peace to a country that has been wracked by civil conflict for over twenty years. The hurdles are many and the international community must be fully engaged at this crucial historic moment.

While we celebrate a North-South peace agreement, we also bear witness to the ongoing tragedy in Darfur. The signing of the peace agreement does not diminish the need to address the situation in Darfur, which remains one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world. Since February 2003 nearly 300,000 people have died and more than 2 million have been displaced from their homes. As we deal with this humanitarian emergency, we must stay fully engaged in southern Sudan to reintegrate this region into a whole and peaceful Sudan. It is a delicate balance. Each region of Sudan has its own dynamic, but successful implementation of the North-South peace process may provide a framework for resolving the crisis in Darfur and prevent emerging conflict in other parts of the country.

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There has been no shortage of peace processes in Sudan in the past. What has been lacking is the will to sustain those efforts. To prevent a repeat of past failures such as the 1972 Addis Ababa accords, we need a strategic approach that focuses on key challenges.

The Security Situation

As in most fragile states, the issue of security in Sudan is critical. Continuing conflict in Darfur and lingering violence in the South must end immediately if reconstruction is to proceed. The situation in Darfur deteriorates with each passing day, while in southern Sudan, government-aligned militias vie for dominance and territory in the area around Akobo. Rumors have surfaced of a sustained military build-up in the Shilluk Kingdom in the Upper Nile region.

Equity issues and feelings of exclusion also cloud the situation. If groups in one region perceive that they are being marginalized, they may resort to armed insurrection to draw attention to their grievances and derail the current implementation process. In USAID-funded focus groups conducted by the National Democratic Institute, southern Sudanese expressed broad support for John Garang, chairman of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM), but some groups said they do not yet feel that the SPLM speaks for them. A sense of inclusion and equitable treatment is critical to winning the support of those groups.

In Kordofan and eastern Sudan the potential for an outbreak of hostilities is real and could jeopardize implementation of the peace agreement. Eastern Sudan could be at risk if simmering tensions there lead to armed confrontation. The transition zones—Southern Blue Nile, the Nuba Mountains, and Abyei—are flashpoints where a tenuous peace holds at the moment. A renewal or outbreak of hostilities in any of these areas might quickly spread and unravel the tenuous commitment to peace.

Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of combatants from all sides—the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), the government of Sudan, and the militias—will have to occur for the peace
agreement to be implemented and sustained. The fact that this was inadequately done in 1972 contributed to the failure of the Addis Ababa accords. USAID is actively assisting young men and women, many of whom have been active fighters their entire lives, to become productive members of southern Sudanese society. In the Upper Nile and Equatoria provinces, USAID has provided these young men and women with fishing and farming equipment that will allow them to pursue socially beneficial economic opportunities rather than a lifestyle of violence.

Much more needs to be done, however, for southern Sudan to regain security. All those who have supported hostilities must stop their assistance and be held accountable for their actions. The re-supplying of belligerents must end. The militias that have yet to lay down their weapons must be brought into the fold and convinced of the benefits of the peace agreement as an alternative to war.

Enforcement mechanisms that the southern Sudanese themselves implement must also be supported if they are to be actively engaged in bringing security to their own territory. The international community must assist the SPLA and the Sudan People’s Democratic Front (SPDF) in demobilizing soldiers who cannot be integrated into the regular armed forces. In this regard, priority should be given to demilitarizing the southern capital of Juba. The new government of southern Sudan can then extend its authority more quickly and effectively. Professionalism must be brought to SPLA ranks and the Joint Integrated Units of combined government and SPLA troops must be made operational as soon as possible. A professional civilian police force must be established to bring law and order to daily life.

Finally, the international bodies that were created to monitor security issues during the peace process must be integrated into the UN peacekeeping force that will now take the lead in providing security. The Joint Military Commission in the Nuba Mountains, the Civilian Protection Monitoring Team, and the Verification and Monitoring Team all monitored the cessation of hostilities in southern Sudan. The contributions these bodies can make by providing lo-