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Referendum in Southern Sudan and the Road to Independence

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Abstract: *Despite the comprehensive peace agreement on Sudan signed on January 9, 2005, several key issues have not been resolved: important political and economic issues, principally the future of Abyei; five contested border areas that were identified in 2005; citizenship; debt relief; and the underlying issue of oil-revenue sharing. Close to 70 percent of Sudan's oil is in the South, and the North has become dependent on that oil for stability and prosperity. If separation goes forward, the South has a huge need to deal with development issues, from governance to education to economic issues, and it is not well equipped to do that. The U.S. and the international community will have to provide critical assistance and will have to do so more intelligently. We also should not be so focused on full implementation and peaceful separation of North and South that we forget the ongoing suffering of men, women, and children in Darfur.*

Any discussion of the current situation in Sudan has to note the environment in which it is taking place. For 200 years there has been favoritism to a small Arab Muslim minority in the northern Nile and marginalization of all other segments of Sudan's society—a society that is enormously divided.

One anthropologist has said there are close to 600 different ethnic groups or tribes and more than 500 languages spoken in Sudan. Throughout the Ottoman Empire, under British colonial rule, and now since independence in 1956, there has been no united Sudan politically, no vision of a united Sudan, and

Talking Points

- Despite the comprehensive peace agreement signed on January 9, 2005, several key issues such as the future of Abyei, contested border areas, citizenship, debt relief, and oil-revenue sharing remain unresolved.
- If separation goes forward, the South has a huge need to deal with development issues, and it is not well-equipped to do that. The U.S. and the international community will have to provide critical assistance and will have to do so more intelligently.
- The reason there are fewer victims in 2011 in Darfur than there were in 2004 and 2005 is that most of the targets have already been destroyed, and we should not be so focused on full implementation and peaceful separation of North and South that we forget to hear the screams of men, women, and children in Darfur.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
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there has continued to be marginalization where people not from the center have suffered discrimination economically, in health care, in education, and politically. This has been the cause of the constant conflicts that have existed within Sudan, and this dynamic will not magically end if there is a peaceful separation between the North and South.

Unresolved Issues

Many people would not have expected the referendum to go forward in the generally peaceful environment in which it did. While personally I have criticisms of some of the U.S. policy in 2009–2010, we should give note and credit to President Barack Obama for his participation in the meeting convened by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon in September, where the stakeholders made a united statement about the importance for the referendum to go forward peacefully, and efforts in December by President Obama and Vice President Joe Biden to contact the regional leaders to emphasize the importance of that going forward. I think this did contribute to the successful referendum vote that had been prescribed during the comprehensive peace agreement (CPA) signed on January 9, 2005.

Oil-revenue sharing, which drives both the contested border and Abyei, is the underlying dynamic and the most dangerous matter that may imperil a peaceful separation.

However, the issues that were identifiable under the comprehensive peace agreement have not been resolved: the important political issues and economic issues, principally the future of Abyei, a region that is fraught with both political and economic significance, a region from which the Ngok Dinka come, which are some of the leading personalities in the South, a region where the Misseriya Arab nomads travel during the rainy season to get grazing lands for their herds.

Second, there are five contested border areas that were identified in 2005 and remain unresolved.

Third, the underlying issue for all of these is oil-revenue sharing. In 1989, when the regime, the NCP, came to power through a coup d'état, they had

exports from Sudan of approximately one-half billion dollars. They rose up to \$9.5 billion; almost all of that increase came from oil that was discovered and is now sold on the world market. The bulk of that oil—close to 70 percent—is in the South. The North has become dependent on that oil for stability and prosperity, and to some extent the South has through an oil-revenue-sharing deal that allowed them to keep approximately \$2 billion per year since the CPA was signed in 2005.

There are many other issues—citizenship, debt relief, etc.—but it is my opinion that the oil-revenue sharing, which drives both the contested border and Abyei, is the underlying dynamic and the most dangerous matter that may imperil a peaceful separation.

Khartoum's Strategy: Delay, Discuss, Delay...

Furthermore, it is my view that the government of Khartoum has engaged in a strategy similar to that which it has used otherwise over the last 15 years, which is to set elaborate negotiating processes—deliberate, delay, discuss, delay, and eventually deny, all the time getting increased leverage. That is what they're engaged in now, and my view is that their expectation is that the U.S. and others, but principally the U.S., will put pressure on Djuba as we approach the July 9 date for the South's independence to make unrealistic concessions to the North and do their dirty work for them. Unfortunately, there's nothing over the last two years that gives me reason to have confidence that we won't be exploited in this manner.

At the same time, I think it is noteworthy that the developments in the Middle East have bled down to Sudan. There have been demonstrations in Khartoum. President Omar al-Bashir has announced he does not plan to run again. I would only hasten to add that plans change. I wouldn't go to the bank on that, but I think it is a direct response to the developments in the broader Middle East.

If separation goes forward, the South has a huge need to deal with development issues, from governance to education to economic, etc., and they're not well equipped to do that. The U.S. and the international community will have to step up and

provide critical assistance and will have to be more intelligent in the ways that we do that.

Nonetheless, the South benefits because President Salva Kiir has proven to be an enormously clever and effective leader of the South. He is the indispensable man. But I hasten to add that he will face political pressures from within southern Sudan when various factions that have been united against the common enemy of the North will no longer have that to unite them as folks jockey for position. If the U.S. provides excessive pressure to get Djuba to make concessions on oil revenue and other issues beyond that which is sustainable and weakens Salva Kiir, he will have to make a decision to stand up to that or imperil his own political future, which in turn will endanger the future and prosperity of the South.

If separation goes forward, the South has a huge need to deal with development issues, and they're not well equipped to do that. The U.S. and the international community will have to provide critical assistance and be more intelligent in the ways that we do that.

The North faces the continued alienation and low-intensity violence in Darfur, Nuba Mountains, and elsewhere because the fundamental marginalization that caused the long civil war between the North and South has not been dealt with.

Darfur

In Darfur, some rebel movement leaders will see an opportunity to exploit weakness, having had the separation of the South that may make offenses on Khartoum. Similarly, in the Nuba Mountains and elsewhere, there will be stresses, and there will be a temptation by the regime in Khartoum to make an Islamist tack to try to unify and strengthen themselves at this time of peril.

The U.S. faces difficult decisions, if it's whether or not Sudan should remain on the terrorist list or how to deal with the various sanctions, principal-

The South can be sustainable after separation. The question is to what extent there will be violence and bloodshed.

ly economic sanctions, that have been applied on Sudan—and I note that most of those sanctions were placed on Sudan as a result of the genocide in slow motion in Darfur. Whether or not it makes sense to lift those because of the North complying with their commitment in the CPA without addressing the ongoing violence in Darfur is a question that's open. It should trouble Members of Congress, and there should be a full and frank exchange between the Administration and Congress on these issues.

Is Southern Sudan Sustainable?

Finally, let me say I am optimistic that the South can be sustainable after separation. The question is to what extent there will be violence and bloodshed.

The North will be under stress that might not have been anticipated, and this might lead to acts of violence to try to gain control over some of the land where they only have titular projection of power. This should concern all of us who have had difficulties dealing with the history of violence, atrocities, murder, mayhem, and misery in Darfur. It's not limited to Darfur, and these atrocities must end. The violence in Darfur and in southern Sudan in 2009 was greater than it was in 2008, and the violence and victims in 2010 were greater than they were in 2009.

I would suggest to you that the reason there are fewer victims in 2011 in Darfur than there were in 2004 and 2005 is that most of the targets have already been destroyed—not because of a change of heart, not because of a change of tactic—and we should not be so focused on full implementation and peaceful separation of North and South that we forget to hear the echoes of the screams of suffering men, women, and children in Darfur.

—*The Honorable Richard Williamson is the former U.S. Special Presidential Envoy to Sudan.*