

Sudan's uphill battle for peace, democracy

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

While President Bill Clinton was visiting several African states, important developments unfolded in Sudan, a country unfortunately not on his itinerary. Both politically and militarily, government forces took a further step forward, along the path to national reconciliation and peace.

On March 31, President of Sudan Gen. Omar al-Bashir sent his official approval of the new Constitution to the Speaker of the Parliament, Dr. Hassan al-Turabi. The Parliament had debated the text in an extraordinary session throughout March, and ratified it. Now, the document will be presented to the population, through a referendum which should be completed by June.

Among the numerous bold initiatives contained in the Constitution, is the full text of the peace treaty which the government concluded with all the rebel factions, except the faction of the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) of John Garang. Thus, the referendum on the Constitution is at the same time a plebiscite on war or peace. If, as is expected, the population votes with a large majority for the Constitution, this will generate enormous pressure on the recalcitrant Garang, to come to the negotiating table.

Another leading aspect, is the guarantee of civil liberties, including the right to political association. Thus, for the first time since the 1989 revolution, which brought General al-Bashir to power, political parties will be allowed to operate. According to norms regulating the foundation of parties, they cannot be regional, sectarian, or ethnically based, but must, like the mass constituency organization known as the National Congress, be representative of the entire country. This is a crucial factor, to prevent the Sudanese political process from regressing to the state it was in prior to 1989, when feudal-style political parties based on family dynasties and religious sects prevailed.

The new cabinet

The other major event signalling progress toward reconciliation, was the reshuffle of the federal government, and the integration into the new cabinet of former rebel leaders, as well as political figures associated formerly with just those sectarian parties. Thus, for example, the new Health Minister, Rt. Lt. Mahdi Babo Nimir, is a relative of Sadiq al-Mahdi, leader of the Umma party, which is controlled by the Mahdi family, and constituted of members of the Ansar religious sect. The new Minister of Irrigation, Dr. Shareef al-Tuhame, is also a former

Umma party and Ansar sect member. There are also a number of former Marxists in the new cabinet, like Abdul Basit Sabdarat, the President's Adviser for Legal Affairs, and Badr-El-din Suleiman, Minister of National Industry.

Consolidating the process of power-sharing, which was written into the peace treaty, the new government also has several people who were leaders in the southern rebel forces. Dr. Lam Akol, the new Minister of Transportation, was a member of the Communist Party, and also of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), an umbrella group based in Asmara, Eritrea created out of the political opposition parties by Deputy Speaker of the British House of Lords, Baroness Caroline Cox. Dr. Akol is a member of the Shilluk tribe in the Upper Nile. His signing the peace treaty with Khartoum meant that the entire Upper Nile State ceased its hostilities, which allowed, for the first time since 1983, for regular rail and road traffic to resume. Another prominent politician from the south, Agnes Lukdo, who was a state governor of the southern state of Bahr al-Ghazal, is a Christian, also a former rebel leader; she has become Minister of Public Service (or Manpower), replacing Angelo Beda, who has become a deputy to Dr. Riek Machar, the chairman of the Southern Sudanese Coordinating Council, based in Juba. Joseph Malwal, the new Minister of Animal Resources, is also from the south, a member of the Nuer tribe, and Maj. Gen. George Kongor, who is Vice President, is a member of the Dinka tribe, the same tribe as Garang.

Among the leading Muslim figures in the government, who have been closely associated with Dr. Turabi, is Mustafa Osman Ismail, the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Dr. Ghazi Salahuddin, Minister of Culture and Information. Dr. Salahuddin, while serving as secretary general of the National Congress for two years, developed it into a mass-based constituency organization.

This new government is committed to completing the peace process, hopefully in the current year. But it will be an uphill battle, considering the range and type of operations being deployed to sabotage peace.

On the military plane, although government forces have recently scored significant successes, they are expecting massive attacks in the immediate future. In March, government troops destroyed three SPLA camps in the Wau area, and reactivated, as a result, the railway links from Babanusah (in central Sudan) through Uwayl, to Wau, which had been under SPLA control. Then, on March 26, it was announced that the government had recaptured the strategic Abigo area, on the Ethiopian border. According to the deputy chief of staff and spokesman of the Armed Forces, Lt. Gen. 'Abd al-Rahman Sirr al-Khatim, the government took Abigo, in Kurmuk, southeast of Damazin, which had been taken by rebel forces and Ethiopian troops in January. Had the rebel offensive proceeded to capture Damazin, it could have cut off energy supplies to the capital, at the El Rosieres dam there.

Yet, despite these important military victories, Sudanese

government officials are alarmed, because of growing evidence that military offensives are being geared up from Uganda and from the Eritrea.

The U.S. 'Africa experts'

In this context, a report carried by the Arabic daily *Al Hayat* on April 3, raises disconcerting questions about the intentions of the "Africa experts" in the State Department, vis-à-vis Sudan. *Al Hayat* reported on a U.S. security and military delegation to Asmara, the seat of the NDA. The delegation included a noted enemy of Sudan, John Prendergast of the National Security Council (NSC); the assistant on African affairs to Defense Secretary William Cohen, Dennis Kern; Philip-Michael Gary, the East African affairs director of AID; Robert Hodeck, former U.S. Ambassador to Addis Abeba and Asmara; Don Tittlebaum, chargé d'affaires of the U.S. Embassy in Khartoum; and Gail Smith of the AID office in Nairobi. The leader of the group was David Dunn, director of the Office of East African Affairs at the State Department.

According to the report, the American delegation met with top leaders of the Sudanese opposition, the NDA, including Mubarak al-Fadl, Abdel Rahman Said, Farouk Ahmed Adem, Sherif Hariri, Abdel Aziz Nafallah, and official SPLA spokesman Mansur Khaled. The delegation later held a separate two-hour meeting with Khaled.

The reported subject of the talks was U.S. policy in the area, and the situation in Sudan. A source close to the meeting told *Al Hayat* that they had discussed topics similar to those broached by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright during her December visit to Uganda, when she met with NDA personnel. They talked about how to build a "new Sudan," and the importance of forging unity among the Sudanese opposition, in order to be able to replace the ruling government in Khartoum. According to *Al Hayat*, the delegation said it was going to report to President Clinton, on their return to Washington.

If the *Al Hayat* account is true, it is urgent to bring out into the public realm, what the content and aims of the sinister delegation was. It is documented, that there are serious, principled, and factional differences among those in the State Department, NSC, and elsewhere, on U.S. policy toward Sudan. Whereas the President has sent repeated signals of willingness to establish a dialogue with the Khartoum government, rogue elements attached to the British intelligence operations, typified by Prendergast, have openly challenged Clinton, and presented as U.S. policy, open support for insurgents against a sovereign government — for example, at a conference of the U.S. Institute of Peace last year (see *EIR*, Sept. 29, "Sudan, Target of Rice War").

Now, in the wake of the President's Africa tour, it would be most opportune to seek out direct contact with the majority leaders of southern Sudan, i.e., those former rebel leaders and former opposition figures who have opted for peace, and are now engaged in the task of creating democratic institutions of self-government for Sudan.

Interview: Babiker Ali Eltom

Sudan's people are looking to the future

Mr. Eltom is the chairman of the state legislative council in the Sudanese capital of Khartoum. He was interviewed by EIR correspondents on Feb. 21.

EIR: We have seen a number of construction sites and new bridges being built in Khartoum. Could you tell what the most important projects are which have come on line?

Eltom: The revenues of Khartoum state have increased from 123 billion Sudanese pounds last year to 182 billion this year. This indicates that there is more money coming in to the government for expenditures, mainly for roads, for the rehabilitation of new and existing agricultural facilities, and for hospitals. Two weeks ago, we had an operation for open heart surgery. We started this in early 1983, but we stopped, because the hospitals were not in good order; but now, they have been rehabilitated. We have put more surgical instruments, staff and logistics, cars, ambulances into the new hospitals. More hospitals have been built in the territories. I am more concerned about the rural areas. About 85% of the people live in rural areas. So, there are more schools, there are more roads, there are more water supply facilities. There are more things like veterinary centers, recreation centers, and the beautification of Khartoum itself. So, there is a lot of effort taking place in Khartoum, just to make it a real city, like a capital. We are taking care of it.

EIR: Is this typical for the country as a whole, or mostly Khartoum?

Eltom: No, Khartoum is just part of it. The same, for example, is taking place in Kadario. There are production schemes, according to the speciality of each state. For example, water and electricity problems in North Kordofan. This is one of the main problems impeding the progress of that area. Water drillings, water projects have been rehabilitated. In the North, we have more expansion in wheat. In the Gezira, we are revising the relationship between the government and the tenants. Canals are being cleaned, areas of agricultural expansion are taking place in the Gezira scheme. So, there are a lot of infrastructure improvements taking place, all enhancing to the welfare of the people. Although they are suffering some hardships because of the disintegration of the economy, they still hope that in the near future, they are going to harvest what they have lost in previous years.