



Sudan Elections and Southern Self-Determination: At Growing Risk [1]

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News [2]

Increasingly pessimistic assessments of Sudan's scheduled national elections (February 2010) make clear that the 2011 Self-Determination Referendum is deeply endangered. If the referendum is aborted, or occurs amidst the grim environment in prospect, it will re-ignite country-wide war

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Sudan's significantly delayed national elections, now scheduled for February 2010, have been very poorly supported by the international community and are at risk of even further delay. A host of technical, logistical, administrative, as well as legal and policy issues have yet to be resolved. A complex electoral calendar is far behind schedule in many critical respects, even as the rainy season has begun in both Southern Sudan and Darfur; this will badly hinder the critical task of effective voter registration, only now getting underway. The Sudanese census seems badly skewed in some of its results, and was conducted with far too little international supervision. Census issues are critical in determining legislative power in the National Assembly that will be formed on the basis of elections less than eight months from now. An abuse of illegitimate and excessive legislative power by the National Islamic Front/National Congress Party (NIF/NCP) could result in a pernicious re-writing of the terms of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA; 2005), which stipulated the current elections and legislative make-up---or amendments to the Interim National Constitution could be passed with the same effect.

Elections in Darfur amidst the current violence, insecurity, and displacement are hopelessly problematic, and it is highly doubtful that anything resembling a representative vote will take place. The electoral process may break down entirely, allowing the NIF/NCP a free hand in construing the Darfur results how they will. Violence in the South has also accelerated in recent months, and President Salva Kiir of the Government of South Sudan has a good deal of evidence for his recent ominous remarks, hinting at Khartoum's stoking of ethnic and tribal tensions:

"The Comprehensive Peace Agreement, that we concluded as a result of enormous sacrifices, is seriously threatened by enemies of peace from without our realm and without.... This is a well-designed strategy to discredit you [Southerners] as a people who cannot govern themselves, particularly as we approach general elections and [the self-determination] referendum." (Agence France-Presse [dateline: Juba, South Sudan], May 26, 2009)

There is also growing evidence that the Khartoum regime is again arming and supplying the maniacal Lord's Resistance Army in Western Equatoria State, as well as providing weapons to competing ethnic groups in Southern Sudan, all with precisely the aim Salva Kiir articulates.

Censorship has actually increased in recent months, and seems likely to increase further in the months before the election. The "Press and Printed Materials Bill of 2009" was passed on June 8, 2009 with several disturbing new features that will inhibit already severely limited freedoms of the press and public expression. The bill contradicts several features of the CPA as well as the terms of the Interim National Constitution mandated by the CPA. Most notably, interference in political expression by the regime's security apparatus is not prohibited by the new law, and pre-publication censorship remains the prerogative of the intelligence services.

Moreover, twenty years after its military coup and the radical remaking of Sudanese governance, the NIF/NCP has consolidated its stranglehold on national wealth and power in a wide variety of ways, many of which work to ensure control of the electoral apparatus. By far the most authoritative analysis of this consolidation of power, and the way in which it is exercised, comes from Gillian Lusk in the current issue of *Africa Confidential*, where she is Associate Editor (June 26, 2009, Volume 50, Number 13, at <http://www.africa-confidential.com/home>). With an unrivaled understanding of the inner workings of the regime, Lusk details the history and consequences of the National Islamic Front military coup of 1989; reveals the deep continuities within today's National Congress Party, particularly its leadership; and gives a compelling account of NIF/NCP methods, strategy, and outlook. The conspicuous failure to understand this strategy and outlook stands as the greatest obstacle to the success of efforts such as that currently being led by US Special Envoy to Sudan Scott Gration.

Edward Thomas has also argued in a recent Chatham House Report ("Against the Gathering Storm: Securing Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement") that,

"Power is being more securely entrenched in the informal and inaccessible networks of security men and business men that run the National Congress Party...."

And that as a consequence,

"there is a real risk that elections will be managed through patronage systems that no longer provide meaningful political services for their people." (Edward Thomas, "Against the Gathering Storm: Securing Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement," Chatham House, June 2009, pages 29, 31, at <http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/publications/papers/view/-/id/688/>)

There have been a series of reports such as Thomas' over the past year, several quite recent, surveying the prospects for national elections and the subsequent Southern Self-Determination Referendum: all present extremely gloomy outlooks (with more or less indirection) and highlight a set of strenuous challenges that continue to go unmet. The present analysis surveys this now substantial body of literature (see brief bibliography at section end), and traces out their collective implications. I

survey additional reports bearing on the specific conditions in Darfur, other marginalized regions of Sudan, as well as the continuing shift in US policy toward accommodating Khartoum's behavior.

The broadest conclusions are that the national electoral process leading up to February 2010 will be unacceptably compromised, and that the NIF/NCP will wage a deeply unfair campaign culminating in rigged election results. These results, translating into a dominant majority in the National Assembly, may seem so threatening to the Southern Self-Determination Referendum that it becomes the occasion for tensions that explode into violence in the near term. The most likely flashpoints remain Abyei and the Nuba Mountains, though recent fighting provoked by Khartoum in Malakal suggests that much of the South is a tinderbox. An alternative outcome would be a wary, distrustful, and halting movement toward the 2011 Referendum. The risk that the NIF/NCP would ultimately undermine the Referendum is extremely high, either by "legislative" or military means. If the Referendum is compromised in any way, the Government of South Sudan will be compelled to opt for war. The international community has very little time in which to avert this catastrophe, which can be achieved only by securing the kinds of meaningful agreements and cooperation from Khartoum that have been nowhere in sight during the four and a half years since the signing of the CPA.

To be sure, some are already casually writing off the national elections, arguing that the Self-Determination Referendum should be the only focus of attention. As Sudan commentator Alex de Waal has rather euphemistically put it:

"The result by now is pretty much a foregone conclusion. The NCP will navigate the elections without difficulty." ("Making Sense of Darfur," June 15, 2009, at <http://blogs.ssrc.org/darfur/2009/06/14/peace-in-sudan-priorities-and-constraints/#comments>)

But de Waal, in his casual acceptance of fundamentally compromised national elections, stands well outside the majority opinion of those who have researched these elections and their specific implications for the very Self-Determination Referendum that he declares to be "the centre of gravity of [Sudan's crisis], and the other [Sudanese] problems are derivative from that." Much of the balance of this analysis argues that such acquiescence before Khartoum's corrupting of the 2010 election will make the Self-Determination Referendum all the more difficult to hold, and in the event (or its absence) a catalyst for renewed war.

[Herewith a brief bibliography of reports on Sudan's elections:

Edward Thomas, "Against the Gathering Storm: Securing Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement," Chatham House, June 2009, at <http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/publications/papers/view/-/id/688/> (hereafter Thomas)

Adam O'Brien, "Sudan's Election Paradox," Enough, June 2009, at <http://www.enoughproject.org/publications/sudans-election-paradox> (hereafter O'Brien)

The Carter Center, "Sudan's 2010 Elections; Critical Steps for a Genuine and Viable Electoral Process," May 7, 2009, at http://www.cartercenter.org/news/pr/sudan_050609.html (hereafter Carter Center)

Justin Willis, Atta el-Battahani, Peter Woodward, "Elections in Sudan: Learning from Experience," Rift Valley Institute, 2009, at <http://www.riftvalley.net/> (hereafter Willis et al)

US Agency for International Development, James Heilman and Michael Chelius, "An Assessment of USAID Election Support Options in Sudan," June 12, 2008, at http://dec.usaid.gov/index.cfm?p=search.getCitation&CFID=7775&CFTOKEN=99688013&rec_no=152470 (hereafter Heilman and Chelius)

Stephanie Schwartz, "Conducting Elections in Darfur: Looking ahead to Sudan's 2009 Elections," US Institute of Peace, March 2009, at <http://swem.wm.edu/blogs/government-information/index.cfm/2009/3/24/Conducting-Elections-in-Darfur-Looking-Ahead-to-Sudanx0027s-2009-Elections> (hereafter Schwartz)

Gerard McHugh, "National Elections and Political Accommodation in the Sudan," Conflict Dynamics, June 2009, at <http://www.cdint.org/> (hereafter McHugh)]

SUDAN'S NATIONAL CENSUS

McHugh articulates the most fundamental truth that seems to have been ignored in discussions of Sudan's elections:

"elections in the Sudan cannot be the end goal in and of themselves. Rather, they must be a means to an end, and that end objective must be effective and sustainable mutual accommodation of oft-competing political interests and perspectives...in the whole of the Sudan." (page 3)

This is an enormous challenge in a country as vast and variously diverse as Sudan; achieving demographic clarity is an imperative, though one clearly not felt as such by the international community. Sudan's opportunity to count its population in a persuasively fair and representative way---the key to legitimating elections---has passed. The results of the 2008 census have now been announced, and while yielding a plausible gross total, there are serious anomalies that demand attention.

[a] Of particular concern is the enumeration of displaced Southern Sudanese living in the north (and excluded from the

population of Southern Sudan), particularly in the Khartoum environs. Even the former NIF/NCP director of the Census Commission has acknowledged a highly significant undercount:

"The former director of the census commission, Awad Haj Ali, said that he believed the census had undercounted Southern Sudanese living in the north, and that their number might be nearer 1.5 million, rather than just 500,000, as found by the census." ("CPA faces strains as polls loom," Oxford Analytica, June 9, 2009)

Others put the number of uncounted Southerners higher yet, and given the range in estimates of internally displaced Southerners during the war years (4 to 5 million human beings), this is certainly plausible (see Thomas, page 15). Awad Haj Ali declared that "the total number of southerners in the north might be 26 percent" (Sudan Tribune [dateline: Khartoum], May 24, 2009). Southern Sudan's population was inevitably undercounted because the NIF/NCP insisted that the census form have no indication of place of birth or origin.

[b] Luka Biong, until very recently the Government of South Sudan Minister for Presidential Affairs, makes a number of telling observations about the results from Darfur:

"The process in the south could be described as transparent, but the problem was in the north where the data and results were not logical, such as the reports of a 60% increase of the population in Darfur since the last census in 1993, and the population of South Darfur increased by 90% during that period. We also have information that the census did not include the IDPs in their camps---leave alone the refugees in the neighboring countries. The strangest thing is that the results show a 322% increase in the population of the nomads [migratory Arab tribal groups, and likely to vote for the NIF/NCP]. What does this mean? Did they bring in people from outside Sudan?" (Interview in Al-Sahafah [Khartoum], May 25, 2009)

In fact, there is compelling evidence that Arab groups from Chad, Niger, and Mali have indeed been settled by the NIF/NCP in various towns and rural areas, including villages and lands destroyed or confiscated by the Janjaweed. The newcomers were also provided Sudanese identity papers. This demographic stratagem is consistent with ambitions outlined in an August 2004 memorandum from a senior Janjaweed official. Nicholas Kristof of The New York Times (February 23, 2005) received the memorandum from someone with access to the classified African Union archive of photographs and documents from the first years of the genocide. It was leaked to him, subsequently vetted, and confirmed as almost certainly authentic. The African Union itself believes the document to be real, as do Alex de Waal and Julie Flint, who cite it in "Darfur: A Short History of a Long War" (page 39), indeed identify the document as a "directive from [Musa] Hilal's headquarters." It calls for the "execution of all directives from the president of the republic," and is addressed to both regional Janjaweed commanders and Khartoum's three main security services (including Military Intelligence, which has dominated security policies in Darfur). It declares bluntly the purpose of the conflict going forward: "Change the demography of Darfur and make it void of African tribes." It encourages "killing, burning villages and farms, terrorizing people, confiscating property from members of African tribes and forcing them from Darfur."

Certainly a "changed demography" appears to be reflected in the new census results for Darfur.

[c] Reservations about the census figure for Eastern Sudan have also been expressed by the Beja Congress. But it is the deep distrust of the results by Southerners (who were given no opportunity to examine or contest census data in advance of their release by Khartoum), and the prospect of 3 million Darfuris being disenfranchised by virtue of displacement, that fundamentally threaten the national elections and any National Assembly constituted on the basis of these electoral results.

As to the broader integrity of the census, Africa Confidential recently provided a highly informed account of circumstances on the ground:

"Census Monitoring Commission boss Abdel Bagi el Geilani Ahmed had declared census coverage was '100%' in the North, with 85-90% in Darfur. Even the normally quiet United Nations noted that coverage was low in Darfur. Amid complaints nationwide, one veteran politician told Africa Confidential how he waited for three days in his village near Khartoum but no one came to count him or his neighbours. As criticism mounted, the NCP began praising the 'international monitors'. No one AC contacted, including a UN official, had seen any---perhaps because there were only 34 for Sudan's 2.5 mn. square kilometres. This gave the regime a free hand." ("Whose Counting," Volume 50, No. 11, May 29, 2009)

The census as it presently stands is a source of deep, perhaps irreconcilable disagreement between the NIF/NCP and the SPLM. Southern skepticism about the results is certainly animated by the electoral implications of losing what may amount to millions of votes in a process that gives compelling evidence of systematic exclusion and reworked data (the example of a 322 percent increase in the population of migratory Arabs in Darfur is only the most conspicuous anomaly). If the new national government is constituted on the basis of present census percentages, the SPLM will go from a 28 percent representation in the National Assembly to something approximating the 21 percent of the population the census deems "Southern."

In a report appearing before release of the census figures and percentages (January 2009), Thomas presciently articulated the scenario that most concerns the SPLM and other opposition parties:

"['Worst case scenario']: The census finds that the population of the South is under 25%, and Southern representatives no longer have enough seats in the National Assembly to be able to reject constitutional amendments, which require a three-quarters majority in separate sittings of both chambers of the national legislature. (Currently, the SPLM has 28% of seats in the appointed National Assembly and other Southern political forces have 6%, against the NCP's 52%.) The non-enumeration of displaced persons in Darfur leads to their disenfranchisement, depriving the SPLM of a possible constituency in the elections. The NCP then uses the legislature to revoke key elements of the CPA, including the right to self-determination, or to extort an unacceptably high price for it." (page 17)

This scenario is far closer to being realized, and suggests further the foolishness of dismissing the implications of national elections for the Southern Self-Determination Referendum. Khartoum is working hard as well to divide Southern votes, covertly funding and supporting political efforts such as that of the grossly expedient Lam Akol. His factitious "Sudan People's

Liberation Movement-Democratic Change" is simply a means by which the regime hopes to sow division among dissatisfied Southerners, and to create leverage in dealing with the SPLM itself.

The international community has done far too little to heed these clear warning signs, which have come in many forms over many months. Indeed, delayed reaction seems to be the order of the day in the world's response to Sudan's growing electoral crisis.

LOGISTICAL, TECHNICAL, AND ADMINISTRATIVE OBSTACLES

The greatest obstacle to free and fair voting is the enormously compressed electoral calendar that Khartoum has engineered through policies of delay, obstruction, renegeing, and bad faith. It is worth looking at this calendar and its relationship to the time-frame envisioned in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA):

- Census: mandated by the CPA to be conducted by July 2007 (the exercise occurred almost a year late);
- National Electoral Law governing the elections: mandated by the CPA to be enacted by January 2006 (passed only in July 2008, two and a half years late);
- National Election Commission (NEC): mandated by the CPA to be established within one month of the election law (the NEC exists only formally; nothing remotely adequate to the challenges of national elections has yet emerged, despite last year's passage of the National Electoral Law)
- Determining the North/South border, critical for any accurate census, for oil revenue-sharing, and for the establishment of voter constituencies: a central demand of the CPA, it has yet to be addressed in any serious fashion by Khartoum, four and a half years after signing of the Agreement;
- Southern Self-Determination Act: mandated by the CPA to be enacted by mid-2007 (the Act did not come up for a vote during the now-completed legislative session; the Act may not pass for a number of months, creating a delay of well over two and a half years);
- National Elections: mandated by the CPA for July 2009 (these have been delayed until February 2010, further compressing the time-frame between national elections and the Southern Self-Determination Referendum);
- Southern Self-Determination Referendum: mandated by the CPA to be held in January 2011 (currently scheduled for February 2011);
- July 9, 2011: end of the "Interim Period" stipulated by the CPA

Writing a year ago, Heilman and Chelius argue that "adhering to the mandates and timetable of the CPA is in the best interest of all parties, including the international community." But this optimism about how the NIF/NCP construes what is in its "best interest" seems naïve, given how "interests" are calculated in Khartoum. Nonetheless, their larger point about what has happened to the timetable was prescient in June 2008 and is now completely compelling:

"[The electoral] timetable has already been voided by the extreme delays in meeting many of the critical milestones in the Agreement. There are indeed many operational obstacles to meeting the July 2009 target for General Elections, including:

- Lack of an electoral law
- Lack of an electoral system
- Lack of a voter registration system
- Lack of an electoral management body
- The logistical impossibility of performing many activities during the rainy season
- Lack of an agreed-upon North-South boundary (necessary for boundary delimitation)
- Lack of Census data (also necessary for boundary delimitation) and likelihood of its lack of acceptance once released" (page 7)

The lack of an electoral system, the beginning of voter registration only as the region enters into the present rainy season, and the absence of a clearly defined North/South border loom as especially threatening to the integrity of elections. Using these delays and their aggregate effects, Khartoum is in a position to ensure that the provisions of the Election Law will be implemented in the ways least threatening to NIF/NCP control of the electoral process. Given the host of difficulties and the sheer scale of many tasks, election outcomes will almost certainly be determined by vote rigging, voter intimidation, bureaucratic obstacles, and coercive patronage voting patterns.

Some of these difficulties have been detailed in the reports surveying elections prospects:

[a] Demarcation of individual election constituencies was supposed to be based on the census results. Because of disputes about the census (which, for example, left the Abyei region without the votes necessary to become an electoral constituency), constituencies cannot be demarcated. As Hafiz Mohammed of Justice Africa has put the matter:

"[The census dispute] is the main problem. How to solve it, no one knows. You have to come out with the demarcation [of constituencies] first, and then the registration of voters and then the other processes, and all that has to finish before February [2010]." (Voice of America [dateline: Nairobi], June 10, 2009)

Given the nature of single representation constituencies, their demarcation becomes an extremely important issue, and particularly in contested regions.

[b] Voter registration is only now beginning, even as the rainy season has already begun in both the South and Darfur. Even in the best of circumstances this would be a monumentally difficult task. Many people have never voted before; a high percentage of those in the South are illiterate; the balloting is excessively complex (twelve ballots are required in the Southern elections, with the possibility of run-off elections); and the absence of a fully constituted electoral management body guarantees that these problems will become more severe as the registration process proceeds. One NIF/NCP official is already speaking of delaying the registration process until November:

"The deputy chairman of the National Elections Commission, Abdullah Ahmed Abdulla, told Reuters the commission was behind schedule because of delays in announcing results of a vital census and in setting up election committees in states. 'We are considering a modification, an adjustment of our old timeframe to accommodate the delays that have taken place, Abdulla said on Tuesday [June 9, 2009], adding it would 'not be very much of a delay.' Abdulla did not suggest any new timeframe but said voter registration---originally set for June---would now likely start in November after disruptive rains have finished.'" (Reuters [dateline: Khartoum], June 11, 2009)

But without a commitment of the appropriate resources---managerial, logistical, transport, and staffing---delays will only compound themselves, inevitably working to the benefit of the NIF/NCP.

[c] This shortcoming points in turn to a critical difficulty identified in the Carter Center Report:

"Substantial responsibility for implementation of the electoral process falls on the 26 subsidiary elections High Committees, one for each state and one for Southern Sudan. The National Election Committee appears to be close to appointing these committees, which will be an important first step. However, with a little less than one month to go until an extensive voter registration process is due to begin, there is a rapidly shrinking window for the High Committees to begin their work and make the necessary preparations for an inclusive registration process. It remains unclear what powers and authorities will be devolved from the NEC to the High Committees. Therefore, a critical priority for action is to clarify the delineation between national, regional, and state election management body responsibilities as the electoral process moves forward." (May 7, 2009)

A month and a half later, little if anything has been done to address the critical issues the Carter Center Report highlights.

[d] Willis et al, in their detailed survey of the history of elections in Sudan, highlight areas of particular concern:

"[T]here are many other kinds of malpractice [besides "ballot box stuffing and switching"], and in the light of previous experience the report draws attention to the need to support the following areas in particular:

- Ensuring press freedom and equal media access.
- Ensuring freedom of movement and association to allow proper campaigning.
- Preventing improper use of government resources in campaigning.
- Monitoring campaign spending as the campaign proceeds, rather than afterwards." (Page 7)

What we find is that the Khartoum regime is moving in precisely the opposite direction. To be sure, the idea that the NIF/NCP would "monitor [] campaign spending" during or after the election, or would refrain from "improper use of government resources," is hopelessly quixotic---and misleading in suggesting that such monitoring and restraint are even remotely possible. But "freedom of movement and association" seems even more imperiled by recent legislative actions and inaction, as well as regime pronouncements. President Omar al-Bashir has threatened the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) with a prohibition of campaigning in the North on wholly contrived grounds; the regime is holding up a new National Security Law that would constrain its most potent electoral weapon, the National Security and Intelligence Service (NSIS); the new censorship law fails to provide real "press freedom," let alone "equal access" to the news media.

Idealistic exhortations are certainly in the spirit of human rights standards being consistently promulgated, even when the chances of these standards being met is vanishingly small. But to urge that the National Election Commission "must use its powers to ensure both greater equality of access to media, and the end of the current routine censorship" (page 60) is indeed mere exhortation, and instead of working to explain Sudan's electoral history under the NIF/NCP ignores it. So, too, with the insistence that "more effective enforcement of regulations on campaign spending are essential" (page 60). No doubt. But as the authors well know, the regime in its twenty years of dominating the economy, banking, and business world of Sudan has created unlimited opportunities to buy votes in any number of ways that escape all scrutiny. The patronage system is fully mature, and more than adequate to escape any nominal "ceiling on expenditures."

[A revealing and very recent account of this patronage system comes from Sudan Human Rights Organization/Cairo [SHROC] and its report on the shamelessly corrupt investment deal offered to NIF/NCP cronies for the vast Gezira (Agricultural) Scheme:

"SHROC reported on Sunday that Minister of Agriculture Abdel-Haleem Al-Muta'fi and the new Governor of Gezira Alzubair Bashir Taha took measures to purge hundreds of the Gezira specialized engineers and other key professionals from the cotton gins and the railway department, in addition to planned displacement of hundreds of thousands of the farmers' families that have lived in and served for almost a century the Gezira Scheme."

"The new Governor, formerly a minister of interior with a violent record against unarmed civilians protesting government policies, launched a massive assault by armed regiments of the police force, the armed forces, and militias of the NCP ruling party, on the markets of Medani, the capital city of Gezira, that terrorized the population, especially the low-income farmers' families selling tea or other local products. Hundreds of the terrorized citizens were then put on custody in appalling conditions,' stated SHROC."

"The next day, the Minister of Agriculture promptly acted to sell cheaply the Scheme's agricultural engineering establishments

and machineries to members of the NCP ruling party in a closed private tender. Another sale was made of the Gezira Railways Department, which serves to ship raw cotton bales to the Maringan Ginning Mills. According to the Cairo-based rights watchdog, the railways department was cheaply sold to GIAD, a company of the international Muslim Brotherhood. NCP party members also allegedly bought the major spare-parts workshop of Maringan, which for decades had ensured high productivity of the gins."

These sales provide yet more electoral leverage for the NIF/NCP and illustrate perfectly how the regime has operated for the past twenty years.]

CENSORSHIP

So great is the issue of censorship in any imaginable election in Sudan, and so completely does the regime control the news media, that as an obstacle in the electoral process it deserves treatment as an issue unto itself, not least because of what it reveals of the character and methods of the NIF/NCP.

The basic logic of censorship in the current environment was outlined this past February (2009) by Human Rights Watch:

"The Sudanese government's active repression of journalists and human rights defenders not only violates the human rights of those who are directly abused, it severely impedes freedom of expression and access to information throughout Sudan. This repression is particularly critical in light of the national elections scheduled for mid-2009-Sudan's first national elections in more than 20 years-and the ongoing International Criminal Court (ICC) investigation into crimes in Darfur. Severe limitations on freedom of expression and repression of media and human rights defenders will act as a huge barrier to the holding of free and fair elections. Human Rights Watch is concerned that the elections and the ICC investigation may be used by the Sudanese government as excuses to further intensify repression." ("It's an Everyday Battle': Censorship and Harassment of Journalists and Human Right Defenders in Sudan," February 18, 2009, at <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2009/02/18/it-s-everyday-battle-0>)

Human Rights Watch details the slow demise of modestly increased press freedoms that followed the signing of the CPA (January 2005) through increasingly sharp crackdowns. It is in this context that we should see the implications of the recently passed Journalism and Press Publications Bill (June 8, 2009). As Reuters notes in its dispatch on the new law,

"[T]he new press bill leaves room for state interference on the grounds of national security or public order and it remains unclear if censorship will be reduced." (Reuters [dateline: Khartoum], June 8, 2009)

Actually, as a Human Rights Watch spokesperson noted, censorship remains quite "clearly" the predominant reality of all Sudanese news media:

"National Security has incredible sweeping powers of arrest for ill-defined acts against the state. Without its reform the new [press and media] act is not going to be enough to ensure freedom of the press,' Selena Brewer from the US-based Human Rights Watch said." (Reuters [dateline: Khartoum], June 8, 2009)

Press freedom in the new law is at once asserted and undermined: no restrictions will be placed on freedom of the press...except on "issues pertaining to safeguarding the national security and public order and health." And of course, as Brewer of Human Rights Watch rightly asserts, national security forces decide what is required to "safeguard national security." The newly created Press Council is nominally the organ responsible for determining the extent of press freedoms, but finally the Council falls under the authority of regime officials or appointees. Most fundamentally, the 1999 National Security Forces Law specifically empowers the National Security and Intelligence Service to censor news reports and arrest journalists. The new law does not change this fundamental fact, and we will see that no honest reporting is permitted on the ICC arrest warrant for Omar al-Bashir, charging him with crimes against humanity; there will be no reporting on the regime's support for Chadian rebels seeking to oust President Idriss Déby in N'Djamena; there will be no reporting on the May 2008 attack by JEM rebel forces on Khartoum; there will be no reporting on current violence in the south. And there will be no honest reporting on the reasons for the many and long delays in the electoral provisions of the CPA. All these topics will fall under the rubric of "national security issue."

KHARTOUM'S EFFORTS TO DESTABILIZE THE SOUTH

The NIF/NCP has engaged for well over a year in a clear pattern of instigating violence in Southern Sudan and the transitional areas (primarily Abyei and Southern Kordofan). This is in addition to the violence that the regime has continued to orchestrate in Darfur, despite assertions to the contrary from various quarters (see my "'Chaos by Design': Khartoum's Patterns of Violence in Darfur," September 13, 2008, <http://www.sudanreeves.org/Article224.html>). A particularly dangerous moment came in May 2008, when Khartoum's Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) destroyed Abyei town itself and a number of nearby villages, displacing as many 100,000 civilians, the vast majority of whom have not attempted to return. This has resulted in an ongoing humanitarian emergency.

The assault on Abyei was deliberately engineered out of tensions created by the SAF. We have an unusually authoritative account of what led to the assault from the highly experienced and knowledgeable Roger Winter, who was present at Abyei in the months before the attacks and the days immediately following:

"During my visits in February and March of 2008, I documented the illegal presence of Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) in the Abyei area. During this period, the Sudan Armed Forces's 31st Brigade used terror tactics to systematically clear the population from the villages outside of Abyei town. The village of Todaj, for example, was rendered devoid of population due to nightly shooting by the Brigade. A nearby International Organization for Migration reception center, set up to assist returning people who had been displaced by Khartoum-inspired violence years earlier, was shut down."

"The tension in the Abyei area was palpable. On May 13, an incident between the Sudan People's Liberation Army, or SPLA,

police and SAF occurred in Dokora village, about four miles north of Abyei. Violence exploded, quickly spreading across the area. On the afternoon of May 14, local officials reported heavy bombardment of Abyei's civilian areas, as well as looting and burning of markets and homes by SAF forces. This precipitated the mass flight of thousands of civilians to safety in the South."

Arriving in Abyei on May 16, 2008 Winter described the aftermath of Khartoum's brutal assault:

"[The town of Abyei] was empty. You could look the full length of streets and see no one. I counted only 10–12 civilians, several of whom appeared to be mentally unstable. The others, sneaking back to where their homes once stood, were evidently attempting to salvage any remaining blankets or belongings. The market had been looted and burned to the ground. Many structures were still smoldering. Block after block of traditional homes were reduced to ashes. Approximately 25 percent of the town's structures were totally destroyed. Shortly after our visit, we received reliable reports that most of the rest was aflame. Abyei, as it had existed several days earlier, had ceased to exist." (Roger Winter, "Abyei Aflame: An Update from the Field," ENOUGH Strategy Paper 21, May 2008)

Despite signing the Abyei Protocol, as a key part of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the NIF/NCP refuses to abide by what was to have been a binding determination by the Abyei Boundary Commission, international experts who performed scrupulously in demarcating the boundary of the Abyei enclave. Such bad faith reflects directly on the credibility of the NIF/NCP as an electoral partner, as well as on its willingness to use violence to destabilize Southern Sudan.

The Nuba Mountains in Southern Kordofan, allied with the SPLM/A during the civil war, reflects many of the same trends toward violence as a means of controlling the elections (see in particular "The Drift Back to War: Insecurity and militarization in the Nuba Mountains," Small Arms Survey, August 2008, at <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/ASAZ-7HVBMP?OpenDocument>). But even in the south itself there is growing evidence of a determination to precipitate violence. In Malakal (Upper Nile), for example, there have been two major breaches of the cease-fire that undergirds the CPA. The most recent was a deliberate provocation by the regime, as Human Rights Watch clearly implies in a letter to President al-Bashir:

"The Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) contingent of the [north/south] Joint Integrated Units [JIU] in Malakal comprises former militia from several groups led by former militia leaders. Tensions surfaced on February 23, 2009, with the arrival of SAF Maj. Gen. Gabriel Getwech Chan, known as Gabriel Tanginya ('Tang'), a notorious former militia leader whose followers include thousands of soldiers currently serving in the SAF unit of the Malakal JIU."

"Tang's arrival inspired particular panic because of his role provoking previous clashes. In November 2006, his presence in Malakal contributed to clashes between the same JIU contingents that resulted in some 150 deaths, and Tang is wanted by the Government of Southern Sudan in connection with those clashes."

In other words, sending Major General Tang to Malakal was a deliberate effort by the NIF/NCP to precipitate fighting, and succeeded precisely as planned (Tang was withdrawn shortly after the fighting started). The signal was clear: particularly in areas where the Joint Integrated Units are operating, Khartoum can undermine whatever civilian security exists and can provoke fighting that weakens not only SPLM authority, but creates unhappiness that has electoral implications (Malakal, for example, is close to the Southern Kordofan border and has a growing Arab population and character).

There is also evidence that the recent inter-tribal and inter-ethnic fighting, so worrisome in Southern Sudan at this point following the CPA, is being stoked by weapons provided by the NIF/NCP. And even the suspicion that weapons are being provided by Khartoum has precipitated fighting at various points of tense confrontation, especially in Jonglei and Upper Nile. Other SPLM sources insist that they have clear evidence that Khartoum has been providing weapons to some of the combatants in ethnic fighting, particularly the Murle, who have been involved in some of the most deadly violence.

To date, this fighting at various locations in the South has exceeded the control of the Government of South Sudan (GOSS). This is in large measure because of the deeply felt imperative by many in the Southern government, and Southerners generally, that they will themselves be the only military guarantors of the 2011 Self-Determination Referendum, and must plan now accordingly. This has forced some hard choices in the allocation of military and security resources, and ultimately financial resources (this is one reason Khartoum keeps its payment for oil revenues to the South so far in arrears---hundreds of millions of dollars are owed at present).

For an excellent discussion of the particular dilemma confronting the GOSS, see "Conflicting Priorities: GOSS security challenges and recent responses," Small Arms Survey, May 2009, at <http://reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/JBRN-7STJ9P?OpenDocument>). The report concludes by noting that,

"As the CPA enters a critical period, Southern Sudan is under pressure from ceasefire violations [by Khartoum] as well as internal instability and security challenges. The GoSS's focus on preparations for a possible military confrontation with the North has limited its ability to address divisions and community security concerns within the South, which are equally destabilizing. This dynamic has not been recognized by many outside observers. A better appreciation of the realities on the ground is crucial to assisting the southern government to reduce the risk of further political, ethnic, and social crisis." (page 7)

The most obvious contribution to a solution could be made by the UN force in Southern Sudan (UN Mission in Sudan [UNMIS], to be sharply distinguished from UNAMID in Darfur). This poorly conceived and badly undertasked operation should be much more active in the field and in using that part of its mandate that comes under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter. The Small Arms Survey report puts the matter squarely:

"First, UNMIS can make a significant contribution to building confidence in the peace by more effectively monitoring the ceasefire and security arrangements of the CPA---arguably the most fundamental task of the peacekeeping mission---through more direct interaction with local actors. Playing this role calls for more dynamic patrolling by military and civilian observers, greater interaction and cooperation at an operational level between the UN military, police, and their counterparts at all

levels, and improved information sharing, analysis, and reporting.”

“To counteract the current perception that there is little recourse to address CPA violations and the tendency of peacekeepers to respond only after outbreaks of violence have occurred, UNMIS could work more with local actors to address concerns before they escalate. Part of UNMIS’s mandate falls under Chapter VII of the UN Charter but it has yet to effectively operationalize this on the ground. This will require a substantial shift in the focus of current assets and human resources. A first step would be to patrol key areas more proactively, as is currently beginning to take place through a deployment in Jonglei. It is from this starting point that a discussion about more effective response mechanisms and protection could be developed.” (pages 7-8)

The electoral implications are not fully drawn, but the report does speak to the dilemma that is at the center of this important assessment of how the GOSS should deploy its security and military assets:

“A more realistic analysis and acknowledgement of possible future scenarios and threats would help enable the GoSS to plan for the Referendum and beyond, to create the conditions for peaceful secession---should this be the outcome of the Referendum---and to overcome the South’s internal divisions after 2011. In the interim, a short- to medium-term strategy is also needed to realistically assess and manage internal threats to security, mitigate the potentially destabilizing impact of the financial crisis and upcoming elections, and moderate the ongoing internal conflicts and criminality that impact on the daily lives of ordinary people.” (page 8)

Though eminently sensible, these recommendations are unlikely to be pursued by UNMIS, which---like UNAMID---seems excessively deferential, even fearful in dealing with Khartoum and its Sudan Armed Forces. But any reduction of inter-tribal and inter-ethnic violence will contribute to a more conducive electoral environment going forward over the critical next 19 months. They will not affect the outcomes of the national elections, but may indeed help work to diminish the crisis that looms ever closer with the inevitable decision by Southerners to secede from the North.

[There is as yet no clear evidence that Khartoum is supporting the resurgent Lord’s Resistance Army [LRA] in its predations in Western Equatoria, but there are nonetheless disturbing claims being made by Southern officials. Martin Tako Moyi, deputy chairman of Gender, Social Welfare, Youth and Sports committee, urged an Egyptian delegation to encourage Khartoum to make unity attractive to Southerners. In the course of his comments he declared, “I have seen with my own eyes Antonov aircrafts [which belong only to Khartoum] dropping arms and ammunition to the LRA, as well as helicopters dropping weapons to some tribes in the south” (Sudan Tribune [dateline: Cairo], June 25, 2009). Dr. Anne Itto, a former commander in the SPLA, declared two weeks earlier:

“We have our [sources] in the region, especially in Western Equatoria, who found debris of Sudanese broad beans and dates.’ Itto explained that the debris was packaging from high-energy foods typically used in desert regions by Sudanese armed forces and that the bags and packets had Arabic letters. ‘So ... it must have been air dropped to LRA by Sudan armed forces.’” (Institute for War and Peace Reporting [dateline: Juba], June 10, 2009)

If Khartoum is indeed again supporting the LRA, its intention to destabilize Southern Sudan at any cost will be transparently clear.

ELECTIONS IN DARFUR

In “Conducting Elections in Darfur: Looking ahead to Sudan’s 2009 Elections” (March 2009), Stephanie Schwartz summarizes the results of a workshop held earlier this year at the US Institute of Peace (USIP). Some of the observations about the difficulties of holding elections amidst the violence and insecurity in Darfur seem rather obvious; other observations are more incisive. Certainly the broadest generalization is unavoidable:

“While establishing voting and electoral infrastructure [in Darfur] may be difficult but feasible, securing the environment for electoral activities, making it safe for parties to hold rallies, for candidates to campaign with freedom of movement and expression, and for citizens to register and go to the polls on election day will require political will from both the Government of Sudan (GoS) and the Darfurian opposition movements. Evidence thus far from the implementation of the census shows that the GoS has been extremely slow to take on preparations for the elections, and that competing priorities are a significant barrier to government action. Without an active commitment from the government and the opposition movements to hold free, fair and non-violent elections, the elections will not be successful.” (page 2)

Other, more specific difficulties suggest an even gloomier prospect. Concerning the 2.7 million displaced persons living in camps throughout Darfur, Schwartz notes:

“The election law presents particular problems for Sudan’s millions of internally displaced persons (IDPs), many of whom are originally from Darfur and may be sympathetic to opposition movements. The electoral law requires prospective voters to register in the constituency where they have lived for the last three months and present some form of personal identification. The registration lists will then be published three months prior to the election. This means that unless provisions are put in place, IDPs would have to relocate to their homes or resettle at least six months before the election to vote in their home constituencies---a highly unrealistic expectation. In reality, IDPs will likely have to vote in their current place of residence. Because those who were displaced are more likely to be opposed to the government, spreading their votes across the constituencies where they are currently living may skew the vote in Darfur in favor of the more pro-government forces who remain.” (page 4)

Ominously, as Thomas notes, Khartoum announced “coverage rates of 85-90% [in Darfur], even though many in the huge population of displacement camps refused to take part.” (page 17)

Moreover, the likelihood that voting can take place in the camps without intimidation from one side or another is exceedingly small; and yet without the votes of those in the camps, the results will be hopelessly skewed. The “single-constituency”

electoral framework also prevents groups that are dispersed from gaining representation:

"Even if IDPs and other minority supporters voted in their current locations for single party, because their presence is so dispersed the single-seat constituencies prevent them from gaining a seat. A 2007 study conducted by Tufts on IDP profiling showed that IDPs comprise 18-23% of the population in Khartoum. However, only one district in Khartoum, Omdurman, has a majority of IDPs. Therefore, unless carefully drawn, the single seat constituencies might marginalize these IDP voters." (page 5)

In fact, such marginalization is part of NIF/NCP electoral strategy and even without fraud certainly guarantees a disproportionately large representation in the National Assembly. With vote rigging, fraud, and the use of an enormous patronage system, the regime will simply decide how many seats it wishes.

The question, then, is whether there should be an election in Darfur in the midst of current insecurity and extreme levels of displacement. There is no simple answer, and the question is really about what sort of elections should be held:

"Given the security constraints, lack of potential political accommodation and minimal incentives for opposition movements to participate, the question remains if elections should be held in Darfur. The elections will most likely not be free, fair and inclusive without a peace agreement prior to the election. However, the majority of experts [meeting at the US Institute of Peace] agreed that at least some elections must still be held in Darfur. Because the CPA requires elections, and absent a postponement decision by the CPA partners, a national election will be held. If those elections do not include Darfur, either side may reject the results as illegitimate and the situation may become worse."

Indeed, given prevailing circumstances, Darfur becomes yet another means by which Khartoum can manipulate election results. Under these conditions, and given the likelihood of an organized boycott---by rebel groups, camp sheiks, and civil society leadership---it would seem better not to legitimate Khartoum's claims that "normalcy" has returned to Darfur, and to forego participation in national elections whose results are already determined. A vote that gives voice to Darfuri aspirations and hopes for regional governance, as well as reasonable terms for wealth- and power-sharing, would be fairer and less likely to work in favor of Khartoum's propaganda machine.

Certainly given Khartoum's behavior over the past six years and longer in Darfur, given the deliberate efforts to subvert the CPA in Southern Sudan, the recommendation of "cooperation" by the regime may be appropriate, but exceedingly unlikely to be heeded in any meaningful way:

"All of these stipulations [concerning security, transparency, transport logistics, early planning, civic education] will require cooperation from the Government of Sudan. From a logistical standpoint, electioneers will need support in establishing security and logistics, such as approving visas for staff and getting the required equipment through customs. On a political level, maintaining security and an atmosphere conducive to free and fair elections will require full government support for the elections process." (pages 6-10)

Even to speak of "full government support" for the elections is to indulge in fantasy. There is not a shred of evidence that such "support" will be forthcoming; on the contrary, as the others reports on elections make clear, there is every reason to expect the opposite. To make such "support" the necessary condition for success is simply to acknowledge failure by other means.

US POLICY TOWARDS KHARTOUM AND THE ELECTIONS

Despite the high-profile Sudan gathering in Washington, DC this past week, there has been no indication or claim of a breakthrough---or even specific progress on the key North/South issues, national elections, the Southern Self-Determination Referendum, the failing peace process for Darfur, and Sudan's critical humanitarian and development needs in marginalized regions. Representatives of the NIF/NCP, the GOSS, and the US, as well as other interested national and international actors, met, confabulated---and then departed. US Special Envoy for Sudan General Scott Gration convened the meeting, and there can be no gainsaying the importance of the occasion for raising the profile of issues that had been left unaddressed by the Bush administration. But these are also issues that have received far too little attention from the Obama transition team and administration. With almost eight months of opportunity, and a vigorous campaign commitment to respond to ongoing destruction in Darfur, there is still no coherent Sudan policy in place.

The Sudan inter-agency working group (State Department, US Agency for International Development, National Security Council, Defense Department, intelligence community) has still not reached consensus on this policy, and it is not at all clear that we will be provided with a forthright account of how claims about Khartoum's "cooperation" in the war on terror insulate the regime from greater US pressure, in particular pressure on our feckless European allies to do more, and on strategic rival China. For now we are best able to gauge the intentions of the Obama administration by the words and actions of Special Envoy Gration, and the tensions between the views he expresses and those of other administration officials.

One such comment that received particular attention was General Gration's assertion that Darfur now reveals only the "remnants of genocide," "the consequences of genocide, the results of genocide" (Associated Press [dateline: Washington, DC], June 19, 2009. This is of course at odds with the words of President Obama, who recently spoke of "ongoing genocide" in Darfur, a comment echoed by Susan Rice, US Ambassador to the UN and former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. But more troublingly Gration, like so many others, fails to take seriously the actual language of the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, even as the US has failed along with the rest of the world in making good on the Convention's two titular obligations. The Genocide Convention specifies a series of genocidal acts, including "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part." In March, Khartoum expelled 13 international humanitarian organizations and shut down three critical Sudanese humanitarian and human rights organizations. This effectively reduced humanitarian capacity in Darfur by approximately 50 percent (even more consequentially in other marginalized regions of the North).

Such expulsions and shutdowns had long been desired and threatened by the regime; they were timed to occur on the occasion of the International Criminal Court's issuing an arrest warrant for regime head al-Bashir, charging him with war crimes and crimes against humanity. Here it is critical to see that the arrest warrant was pretext for, not cause of, the expulsions. There is no evidence whatsoever for Khartoum's preposterous claim that all these organizations had assisted the ICC and exceeded their humanitarian mandate by spying and engaging in what was allegedly espionage. The same men making such claims also continue to argue that the Darfur conflict is of Western manufacture, an assertion made most recently by powerful Presidential Assistant Nafi'e Ali Nafi'e in Lebanon (New Vision [dateline: Khartoum], June 21, 2009). Until very recently, Nafi'e was in charge of the Darfur portfolio.

What is most disturbing about Gration's comments is not the ill-informed claim about the end of genocide, which was promptly disowned by a State Department spokesman from the very podium Gration had used the day before (notably, when in Darfur Gration visited only camps approved by the regime, which has sanitized the appearance and increased the security of several camps for just such visits by foreign dignitaries). Rather, with so many millions of lives and livelihoods threatened or destroyed, Gration chose to make casual and ill-informed comments about the restoration of humanitarian capacity in Darfur. Gration claimed, according to www.America.gov ("Engaging the World"):

"...some of the aid levels currently are not sustainable because they are being implemented through emergency methods. 'But with the new NGOs that are going back in right now, we believe we'll be able to sustain these operations and actually get more capacity than we had,' he said."

This is deeply, culpably deceitful (see my analysis of the curtailment of humanitarian capacity as of May 14, 2009, "Darfur Humanitarian Expulsions, Two Months On," at <http://www.sudanreeves.org/Article242.html>). There is no conceivable way that the operational capacity, international staff, historical memory, resources, or facilities of, for example, Save the Children/US can be replaced except in the long-term by Save the Children/Sweden; the same is true of the replacement of CARE/US by CARE International, and Mercy Corps/US by Mercy Corps/Scotland (Padco, an international development consulting firm has also been allowed to operate, but does not bring the same direct humanitarian capacity of the other expelled organizations represented). The organizations themselves are quite frank about all this.

Nor does Gration mention the enormous losses in capacity that remain with the expulsions or Oxfam/Great Britain, Medecins Sans Frontiers (MSF) sections (including France and Holland), the International Rescue Committee, Action Against Hunger, and five other major international relief organizations. Only unsustainable emergency actions by UNICEF and the UN's World Food Program have managed to avert catastrophe so far, even as a large number of lives have certainly been lost, particularly among the very young who were beneficiaries of supplementary and therapeutic feeding centers, a number of which were shut down as a result of the expulsions. Primary medical care, which will be critical in responding to water-borne diseases during the present rainy season, is fundamentally compromised by the expulsion of MSF. The loss of Oxfam/Great Britain and the International Rescue Committee will seriously compromise the ability to sustain delivery of clean water. Action Against Hunger and Save the Children/US were key implementing partners for the UN's World Food Program; without their presence, and that of other implementing partners, food distribution will become increasingly random and unsupervised throughout the rainy season.

The overall quality of humanitarian care, often as important as the quantity, has suffered a sharp blow from which it has not begun to recover.

What does all this suggest about elections in 2010 and the 2011 Self-Determination Referendum? If US relations with the Khartoum regime are defined by the evident perspective of General Gration, if his failure to see the connection between the genocidal destruction of the past and the regime's current policy of humanitarian attenuation governs ongoing diplomatic communication, then it would appear extremely unlikely that he will be able to extract any of the cooperation that all election observers agree is fundamental to even marginal success:

"The stakes are very high [in Sudan]. If the [2010] election should lack credibility, it is hard to see how the Comprehensive Peace Agreement can survive."

"The 1996 [NIF/NCP controlled] election was an extreme example of electoral pretence. However, it illustrates how it is possible to go through some of the motions of free and fair elections without actually offering any significant degree of choice or ensuring any substantial popular participation."

"The Government of Sudan and National Election Commission should take every opportunity to secure electoral assistance---in the form of physical resources and training---from the international community, and the provision of such assistance should be treated as a priority in that community. Failures in procedure will undermine the process as swiftly and completely as will malpractice." (Willis et al, pages 6, 8, 62)

"Citizens of South Sudan are more interested in voting in [the Self-Determination Referendum] than they are in the General Elections that are supposed to precede the referendum. However, little planning has taken place to prepare for the referendum.... As with the General Elections, the Self-Determination Referendum has already fallen behind its timetable. Passage of the Referendum Act is a year late [now over two years late, without any near-term prospect for passage---ER] and the [USAID] assessment team detected little forward movement there." (Heilman and Chelius, pages 2, 4; June 2008)

"The primary objective of this paper was to explore whether elections can achieve effective political accommodation in the Sudan. The assessment presented here has found that the process and likely outcomes of elections, in the absence of other modalities, will not achieve political accommodation in the Sudan, and as such will not deliver on the desire for equitable sharing of power at the core of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement." (McHugh, iv)

"Continued delay in the amendment and implementation of laws incompatible with the CPA and the Interim National Constitution threatens to undermine the electoral process. Reform and implementation of these laws is critical to ensuring key democratic rights of Sudanese citizens and civil society." (Carter Center)

"For elections to be free and fair, other conditions are needed. The CPA and the Interim National Constitution require the transformation of the security services into a body for information-gathering and analysis. To implement this, the current broad powers of the security services to arrest and detain people without charge for up to nine months needs to be abolished. The director of the security services can grant security officers immunity from criminal proceedings and this has created a situation of near-total impunity for abuse." (Thomas, page 17)

"All of these stipulations [concerning security, transparency, transport logistics, early planning, civic education] will require cooperation from the Government of Sudan. From a logistical standpoint, electioneers will need support in establishing security and logistics, such as approving visas for staff and getting the required equipment through customs. On a political level, maintaining security and an atmosphere conducive to free and fair elections will require full government support for the elections process." (Schwartz, page 10)

In turn, these observations force the question articulated by O'Brien:

"The NCP is notorious for ignoring the rule of law, persecuting dissenting Sudanese voices, breaking existing agreements, and using ruthless force against civilians. Why should international diplomats believe the NCP will behave any differently during the course of an election, and what guarantees and safeguards will be put in place to prevent cheating?" (page 1)

This is precisely the question that Gration, the US, and other international actors should be asking---urgently, forcefully, relentlessly. Only realistic answers can serve as an effective basis for policy toward Khartoum. Instead, Gration offers soothing words to the regime, speaks with irresponsible ignorance about the humanitarian crisis in Darfur, and simply gives no evidence of understanding the fatal threats facing national elections or the Self-Determination Referendum.

On present course, both elections and peace in Sudan are doomed.

Links

[1] <http://www.sudanreeves.org/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=246>

[2] <http://www.sudanreeves.org/index.php?name=News&catid=&topic=2>