

Vanguard of Peace: an Assessment of Nigeria's Contributions to the Sudanese Peace Processes

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Introduction

Grim scenarios notwithstanding, there is nothing inevitable about conflicts between African states and their numerous, culturally distinct, identity groups. Deep social cleavages and conflictual relationships have occurred in other countries outside the continent where people and groups have disagreed over basic rules guiding their socio-economic and political engagement with the state. However, in all of the cases comprehensive pictures have shown that accommodation, reciprocity, and negotiation have been adopted as the best strategy for the management of such conflictual state-group relationships (Rothchild, 1997: 1).

While negotiation and dialogue offer the best possible way-out in a state-groups conflict, internal conflict still remains the most difficult of conflicts to negotiate. The history of modern civil wars shows that only a quarter to a third of internal conflicts found their way to the negotiating table. In instances where military victories have been achieved, defeat of rebellion is not a guarantee that relative peace and stability can be achieved. At best military defeat of rebellion drives rebel causes underground only to re-emerge at a later date. In principle, negotiation through dialogue remains the best policy for parties in an internal conflict. However, experience has shown that the structural complexity and dynamics of internal conflicts, most

often, constrains the success of negotiating a peaceful and inclusive end to civil conflicts (Zartman, 1995: 3).

No continent better shows the difficulties involved in negotiating a peaceful end to internal conflict than Africa. Experience from the continent shows that negotiating a peaceful end to civil conflict is fraught with mirages of problems and difficulties. Many negotiation processes on the continent collapsed at the last stage while controversies and crisis dogged others from inception. Some led to the signing of landmark peace agreements, only for them to collapse at the implementation stage, thereby leading to the re-enactment of a new phase of violent conflict (Agbu, 2006: 3). Experience at negotiating a peaceful end to conflicts in South-Africa, Namibia, Angola, Mozambique, Congo, DR, Liberia, Sierra-Leone, Coted'ivore, Rwanda, Burundi, Sudan and other African conflict spots shows that a successful negotiating process requires a great deal of patience, flexibility, political commitment, and utmost sincerity by parties in such negotiations.

Of all Africa's violent civil wars none has proved highly elusive at resolving like the decades long civil conflicts that have ravaged the Sudan. The history of the conflicts of Sudan is littered with numerous failed attempts at brokering lasting peace. Most of the negotiations that have evolved, in the cause of bringing peace to Sudan, have centered on how to manage the complexities and the dualistic identity that remained the hallmark of Sudanese politics and conflicts (Deng, 1995: 82). Most of the peace initiatives illustrate the range of outcomes that have been envisaged in efforts to negotiate the continent's most intractable conflict.

Since the Juba Conference of 1947, which first attempted to negotiate a political union between the north and south, through to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005, which brought to an end the second phase of North-South war, the positions of the political

parties regarding the conflicts have undergone tremendous change. Unlike any other conflicts on the continent, the wars of the Sudan and its various peace processes have consumed enormous human and material resources. It also witnessed the greatest involvement, both state and non-state, bilateral and multilateral, mediators from within and outside the continent, of which Nigeria remains prominent. The complex and intractable nature of the Sudanese conflicts has meant that various interested parties were involved in efforts at brokering lasting peace. In view of this, the article intends to look at the dynamics of the Sudanese peace process and assess the contributions of the Nigerian state to the various peace processes.

Sudan: the Long Road to Peace

Many peace processes have been embarked upon by parties to conflicts in Sudan with assistance and support from various third party mediators, from within and outside Africa. The first of which, to have been successfully concluded, thereby heralding a period of peace and stability, was the 1972 Addis-Ababa Peace Agreement between the Government of Sudan and Southern Sudan People Liberation Movement (SSPLM). Several factors contributed to the emergence of a constructive negotiation process that facilitated the 1972 agreement and subsequent agreements after the collapse of the 1972 Addis Ababa accord. Of great importance were the emergence of identifiable bargaining parties; mutually painful stalemates; commitment of the parties to find a political solution; external pressure, and mediators that actively engaged parties in the negotiations (Curle, 1971: 243; De Waal, 2005: 130-133).

Certainly, the final agreement of 1972 did not spring from the minds of men at Addis Ababa. Rather the formula of sub-regional autonomy and group rights, that was at the heart of the agreement, had previously been laid-out at the 1965 Round Table Conference and discussed, at length, by the Twelve Persons Constitutional Drafting Committee that emanated from it. Beside the compromises, which

are critical in initiating the negotiation process, at least three major accommodations aided the success of the negotiation in Addis Ababa. The first of these was the recognition of Arabic as the National official Language for the Sudan and English as the principal language in the Southern region, the incorporation of SPLM fighters into the new Sudanese army stationed in the South, and the agreement on unity of Sudan with substantial regional autonomy for the south (Assefa, 1987; Alier, 1990).

In-line with the provisions of the Addis Ababa agreement and the follow-up Southern Provinces Regional Self-Government Act of 1973, the southern region (composed of Bahl-el-Ghazal, Equatorial and Upper Nile Provinces) constituted the 'autonomous Southern region' in a United Sudan. A high Executive council and People's Regional Assembly were created as the Executive and Legislative arms of the Southern government. The Southern region had authority to handle specified sub-regional subjects stipulated by the act establishing it. Regardless of the regional autonomy, the leading position of the government in Khartoum in center-regional relations was never in doubt. Indeed a critical shortcoming of the 1972 accord was the fact that central-regional relations were not clear-cut and this was reflected in the 1973 constitution. President Nimeiri took undue advantage of the ambiguity to intervene in regional elections and took critical decisions without recourse to Southern authority nor the wishes and positions of southern politicians and elites (Rothchild, 1997: 228-234).

Evidence of president Nimeiri's reconsideration of the extent of Southern autonomy began to emerge after the initial transition period. By the early 1980's president Nimeiri had systematically subverted the most important provisions of the 1972 agreement. However, the two most provocative policies, introduced by Khartoum, that invalidated the agreement were: the imposition of Sharia Islamic law on Sudan amidst opposition from southerners and moderate Northern

politicians, the re-division of the south into three district administrative regions in June 1983, in-line with the new administrative re-organization in the North. By these acts, argued Malwal, (1985: 34) President Nimeiri “*took the final steps which in effect abrogated the 1972 Self-Government Act for the South, as contained in the 1972 Addis-Ababa Peace Agreement.*” Amidst the escalating tension and uncertainty a new rebel movement the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement /Army (SPLM/A), led by the late John Garang, took up arms and the second phase of the North-South Civil war unfold (Rothchild, 1997: 237).

With the collapse of the 1972 peace agreement came renewed hostilities between successive regimes in Khartoum and various rebel movements from the south. Of the rebel groups that engaged Khartoum in the destructive second phase of the conflict, the most politically organized and military formidable was the late Garang, led by Sudan People’s Liberation Movement. As the military confrontations become fiercer the scale of destruction and humanitarian crisis that they triggered became catastrophic. The human suffering, that was a consequence of the conflict, led to the initiation of Operation Lifeline Sudan, one of the most expensive and sustained humanitarian interventions of the 1980’s.

As the conflict raged several peace efforts were initiated by different actors and interested parties from within and outside the continent. These efforts can be classified into three main strands; direct negotiations between the parties; third party mediation, and scholarly dialogue (Deng, 1995: 95). The outcomes of such processes included, in chronological order, the Koka Dam Declaration, of March 24, 1986; the Sadiq-Garang talks of July 31, 1986; the Harare melting of March 20-22 1988, led by the global inter-action council of former Heads of state and Government; the Mirghani-Garang agreement of November, 16, 1988; two meetings between the SPLM/A and El-Bashir’s revolution front for National Salvation in Addis Ababa

19-20 August 1989 and 1-5 December 1989 in Nairobi under leadership of one time President of the U.S Jimmy Carter; several meetings mediated by Nigeria, and lastly, the Inter-Government Authority on Development mediated talks that was launched in 1993 in Nairobi Kenya (Deng, 1995: 97).

The Inter-Governmental Authority on Drought and Development, later renamed Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), was by far the most sustained and remains the longest running peace initiative on Sudan. The initiative was chaired by Kenya and enjoyed active support from regimes in Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti (ICG, 2002: 155). The series of peace talks that formed the IGAD process went through several phases, marked by ups and downs, before finally culminating in the signing of the comprehensive Peace Agreement. Major landmarks that littered the process included the 1994 talk that produced the declaration of principles; on which subsequent talks were hinged. This was followed by the Machakos talks of 2002 that produced the Machakos protocol, the Nakuru talks; and the Naivasha talks that produced the Naivasha agreement on security issues, dependant upon the resolution of the protocols on power sharing and on resolution of issues on the areas of Abyei, Nuba Mountains and southern Blue Nile on 26th May 2004 (ICG, 2003: 3-6). This ended the political negotiations between the two sides and paved the way for two final technical phases on modalities for a comprehensive ceasefire, security arrangement, and implementation (ICG, 2004a: 2).

Negotiations directed at resolving other outstanding issues continued between representatives of the two parties. With support and pressure from IGAD mediators, friends and partners of IGAD and the wider international community, the parties to the negotiations concluded the remaining talks on 31 December 2004. Subsequent to this completion, the nine protocols were brought together under a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that was signaled by a

colourful ceremony in Nairobi, Kenya on 9th January 2005. The final signing of the agreement officially brought to an end the second phase of the Sudan Civil war. The CPA comprised all provisions relating to armed forces, Southern autonomy, oil wealth sharing, economic issues, general administration of the south, Islamic law, post- conflict reconstruction of the southern region, and other related issues (Sudan Comprehensive Peace Agreement, 2005). In all the CPA offered a comprehensive negotiated resolution of all contentious issues that underlay and shaped the Sudanese Civil war through its course and phases.

While the IGAD peace process gained credibility and momentum, after considerable investment of political will, funding by the IGAD countries and their international partners, as well as painful considerations of issues involved, the same could not be said about the Darfur Peace Process. For example, the initial mediation by Chad lacks on international support and commitment. At the time international community focus was on the IGAD mediated talks in Kenya and the prospects of arriving at a peace deal between Khartoum and SPLM/A (ICG, 2004a: 10-13; ICG, 2004b: 13-15). The situation only changed when the mediation process was taken over by the African Union under the leadership of Nigeria's president and then AU chairperson Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. Subsequently, upon the taking over of the mediation process by the African Union, as mediator, the peace talks were moved from Abeche to N'djamena, Chad and from there to Abuja, Nigeria.

The agenda in Abuja, agreed upon by an AU mediation team in consultation with other parties, focused on four issues, to be addressed sequentially. They included, humanitarian, security, political, and socio-economic issues underlying the conflict (Saka, 2005: 192). After a series of protracted talks in Abuja, the rebel groups and the Sudanese government were able to reach agreement on security issues and humanitarian access. The agreement of

November 9, 2004 on the two issues was essentially a statement on modalities for better implementation of the humanitarian ceasefire agreement concluded seven months earlier in the first N'djamena talk (ICG, 2005: 14).

Further to the signing of the agreement the parties submitted political declarations of principles to the AU mediation team. It is on the basis of the DOP that the mediation team drafted a mutually acceptable document to guide future talks between the sides. The principles included by the mediation team in its draft declaration are: recognition of Sudan diversity; democracy; pluralism and the rule of law; affirmation of citizenship as basis for rights in Sudan. Others are: establishment of a federal system of government with substantial devolution of power and responsibility, need to combat culture of impurity, investigation of human rights violations, rights of return for displaced persons, need to address environmental degradation, land ownership and water related disputes, and broad security arrangements among others (ICG, 2005: 16).

Subsequent peace talks in Abuja were devoted to discussion directed at resolving the mirage of socio-economic and political grievances that gingered the rebellion. For more than a year after the signing of the humanitarian and security agreement, the mediation team and the parties to the conflict strove hard to evolve a mutually acceptable agreement on power and wealth sharing. The seventh and final round of talks that began on 29 November 2005 went no where for close to two months. In February 2006, the mediators sought to end the stalemate by encouraging separate bilateral power-sharing talks between the government and Abdel Wahid's factions of the SLA/M. These talks hit the wall when Abdul Wahid backed-out at the last moment (ICG, 2006: 2).

As parties become more intransigent and held to their positions, the prospect for a comprehensive agreement diminished. A twist

occurred in March when the government sent strong signals that it might be willing to make concessions following its discussions with the international community in Brussels on March 8. On 25 April, the AU mediation team presented to the parties a compromise document and gave them five days to accept or reject it. On 30 April, the government accepted and signed the document despite several reservations. On May 5, Mimi Arkou Minawi, the factional leader of the SLA/MM signed the document. However, Abdul Nour, the leader of the SLA/AW and JEM representation, refused to sign the document. The stand-off by these groups meant that the Darfur Peace Agreement had no general acceptability by all the sides that were parties to the negotiation in Abuja (Jooma, 2006: 6-8; ICG, 2006: 7). The signing of the DPA by Minawi formally signals the official ending of the Abuja talks. The DPA consists of three protocols on, power sharing, wealth sharing and security arrangements, as well as a chapter laying out the framework for a “*Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultation*”.

Certainly, one of the major weaknesses of the DPA was that it did not conclude with the agreement of all the rebel groups represented at the talks. The mediation team’s failure to win the confidence of Abdul Wahid Nour, head of the majority of representation for the SLM, significantly undermined the acceptability of the agreement by the wider population of Darfur (Jooma, 2006: 7). The lack of modalities and implementation guarantees for disarmament of the janjaweed militias and voluntary returns of displaced populations is also one of the agreements greatest failings. In essence, the international community, in its eagerness to get a deal at whatever cost, ended up brokering a peace deal that was structurally weak and lacked wider acceptability (ICG, 2006: 4).

Nigeria’s Contributions to the Sudanese Peace Process

It is Nigeria’s belief that socio-economic development and integration in Africa can only be attained under an atmosphere of

peace and stability. It was this firm belief that informed most of their actions and efforts towards the maintenance of peace, security and stability on the continent (Olusanya and Akindele, 1986; Akinyemi, Agbi and Otubanjo, 1989; Saliu, 1999). Nigeria in fulfilling her mission of a leader within the continent, has taken bold steps and borne heavy responsibilities in her strive to promote and maintain sustainable peace and stability in Africa. Nigeria’s record as a vanguard of peace, within and outside the continent, speaks for itself (Saliu, 2000: 30; Saliu, 1999: 29-31; Saliu, 1998).

In line with her record of pro-active engagement in the cause of peace in Africa, Nigeria has, for a long time, been a major stakeholder in the Sudanese peace process. Successive regimes in Nigeria have been strongly involved in efforts directed at finding lasting solutions to the long-running civil war in Sudan. As an active interested party, Nigeria has hosted peace conferences on the Sudanese Civil war on two occasions. Nigeria was strongly involved in the making of the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement of 1972, even though she was not a major mediator. After the peace deal was successively accomplished Nigeria closely monitored the implementation of the agreement before it finally collapsed. Upon the collapse of the 1972 agreement, Nigeria, in collaboration with the then Organization of African Unity was at the fore-front of efforts to bring the warring sides back to the negotiating table. Since the inception of the IGAD peace process Nigeria has stayed committed to the IGAD collaborators and partners in resolving the foremost intractable conflict on the continent.

With the inception of his administration in 1999, Nigeria’s President Olusegun Obasanjo, a long time collaborator in the Sudanese Peace Process has vigorously pursued the realization of lasting Peace in Sudan (Deng, 1998). He was presented an opportunity to continue the pursuance of his long time interest in resolving the Sudanese conflict through the platform of the Millennium Action Plan. In

charge of regional conflict related issues for the millennium plan, president Obasanjo attempted to convene in 2001 a Southern Sudan Political Forces Conference in Abuja, aimed at helping Southern Sudanese leaders reach a local consensus on future peace negotiations. A possible national conference was envisioned as the immediate step after the southern conference. Although these planned conferences failed to materialise, the attempts offered, according to Alex De Waal was “*the most promising peace initiative for some years*” (ICG, 2002: 196). Irrespective of the failure of the conference to materialize in 2001 Nigeria continued her support for the IGAD process until it delivered the peace agreement of January 9, 2005.

On the Darfur conflict, president Obasanjo has, since his election as African Union Chairperson, stepped up efforts in search of lasting peace on the Darfur Crisis. Acting in his capacity as African Union chairperson, he appointed former Nigerian head of state, General Abdul-Salaam Abubakar, as his special envoy to Chad and Sudan on the Darfur Conflict. The special envoy visit to Darfur, for assessment of the humanitarian crisis and the report of the visit, was a major catalyst that spurred the AU to intensify efforts for peaceful negotiation (Adeniji, 2004: 10).

Given the decision to encourage dialogue, delegates from the rebel groups and the central government in Khartoum started meeting in Abuja in August 2004 for peace talks. The first two rounds of peace talks at Abuja heralded the signing of the Abuja agreement of November 9, 2004 on security arrangement and Humanitarian access (ICG, 2006). The months between the signing of the Abuja protocols on security arrangement and humanitarian access and the final signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement, witnessed a series of diplomatic maneuvers and moves directed at finalizing a peace deal. It was on record that Nigeria, using her positions within the AU and being a lead mediator, was greatly involved in most of the moves

aimed at bringing about an acceptable deal between the rebel groups and the central government delegates at Abuja. Nigeria devoted enormous human and material resources to the Abuja Peace talks and deserves credit and recognition for the important part she took toward the making of the final Darfur Peace Agreement. More than any other state on the continent, Nigeria stays committed to the peace process through thick and thin.

Table One

<i>Peace Process</i>	<i>Parties</i>	<i>Venue</i>	<i>Movers of the Process</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
Abuja Peace Conference I	Government of Sudan, SPLM/A Mainstream, SPLM/A Nasir Faction	Abuja, Nigeria	Nigeria Govt	26 May-4 June 1992	Partly successful. A joint resolution was reached.
Abuja Peace Conference II	Government of Sudan, SPLM/A Mainstream, SPLM/A Nasir Faction	Abuja, Nigeria	Nigeria Govt	1-7 May 1993	Successful. Led to discussion on power and wealth sharing.
Abuja Peace Talk I on Darfur	Govt of Sudan SLM/A and JEM	Abuja, Nigeria	Nigeria Govt and the African Union	August 2004	Laid the groundwork for talks on security arrangement and humanitarian access.
Abuja Peace Talk II on Darfur	Govt of Sudan SLMM/A and JEM	Abuja, Nigeria	Nigeria Govt and the African Union	Sept-Dec 2007	Led to the signing of the Humanitarian Access and Security Arrangement.
The Libyan Initiative	Govts of Sudan, Libya, Egypt, Chad, Nigeria and African Union Peace and Security Council chair	Tripoli, Libya	Libya and Nigeria Govt	October 2004	It produced a general statement of support for AU Mediation efforts on Darfur, in Abuja.

	person				
Abuja Peace Talks III-IV on Darfur	Govt of Sudan, SLM/A Minni Minnawi faction SLM/A Abdul Wahid Nour faction and JEM	Abuja, Nigeria	Nigeria Govt and the African Union	May 2005	Led to the signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement between the Govt of Sudan and SLM/A Mini Minnawi faction.

Tabulation of Nigeria's involvement in Sudan Peace Processes,

(Saka, 2005: 201-203).

Aside from being a major mover and backer of the Abuja Peace Talks on Darfur, Nigeria was also one of the first counties to send troops to the troubled Western Region of Sudan after modalities for deployment and the mandate for the AU mission in Darfur was finalized. Nigeria has consistently increased its troops and logistical contributions to the mission in line with the expansion of the mission mandate and force strength. It is on record that the Nigerian contingent was the largest troop contingent contributing appreciable logistic support to the then African Union Mission in Sudan, AMIS and the present hybrid United Nations-African Union Mission in Sudan (Human Rights Watch, 2006: 52; Boshoff, 2005: 58).

Conclusion

Sudan has witnessed a plethora of peace initiatives, processes, and agreements aimed at ending its multi-faceted conflicts. With the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement on January 9 2005, in Nairobi Kenya, the decade's long civil war in the South was officially concluded. In the same view the signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement on May 5th 2006 was also expected to bring an end to violence and hostilities in Darfur. However, this expectation was not to be, as the DPA failed to enjoy wider acceptance among the rebel groups that were parities to the peace process in Abuja. While the agreement represents an opportunity for peace its non-acceptance by all has greatly diminished its prospect for heralding lasting peace

in Darfur. Though the CPA and DPA, taken together, has the prospect of bringing Sudan to a new dawn of peace, there is the need for parties to the agreements to stay committed and the international community to continue to offer the support and commitment needed to make the agreements work.

As things stand, the central Government in Khartoum is renegeing on some of its commitments to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The lack of political will by Khartoum to stay committed to the CPA could jeopardize the hard earned peace in Southern Sudan. This, coupled with the fact that the DPA has no wider acceptability, means that the prevailing peace in Sudan will continue to remain precarious. Given the situation on the ground in Sudan, there is the need for the international community to continue to pressurize Khartoum to remain committed to the agreements it signed in Nairobi and Abuja. There is also the need to devise modalities that will ensure that non-signatory parties to the DPA accept the agreement. Above all there is the need to ensure that parties to the peace agreements in Sudan remain on track, else the needed stability may elude Sudan and the country may plunge back into violence, conflict, and instability.

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