

CRITICAL QUESTIONS

Confronting the Crisis in Sudan

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October 30, 2007

The Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) announced on October 11 its decision to boycott the government of national unity. This decision stoked fears that the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which put an end to nearly 20 years of civil war between southern Sudan and the government in Khartoum, is near collapse and that a resumption of overt hostilities is imminent.

Q1: Are we likely to see a resumption of hostilities?

A1: Not necessarily, although the announcement does raise the stakes in the ongoing north-south interactions, in a context that is already fragile and unpredictable. The intention of Salva Kiir, president of southern Sudan and vice president of Sudan, was likely to send a wake-up call to both the government in Khartoum and the international community to ensure that the key provisions of the CPA are fully implemented. Since the agreement was signed in January 2005, implementation has faltered badly, and early deadlines—in civil service reform, transparency in the disbursement of oil revenues, demarcation of the boundary between north and south Sudan, and withdrawal of northern security forces from the south—remain unmet. Equally important is the status of preparations for nation-wide general elections, currently mandated for March 2009, with a preparatory national population census due in January 2008. It is not clear what the SPLM's next move would be should Khartoum refuse to respond to the current set of southern grievances, which makes resolution of the current impasse all the more critical.

Q2: What are the chances that the CPA will create a lasting peace?

A2: Very small. The international community will need to push the signatories to abide by their commitments. Getting the SPLM and Khartoum to sign the CPA was a long and arduous process, achieved only with a major investment of time and diplomatic capital by the international community—most notably the United States, Norway, the United Kingdom, and Kenya. From the outset, however, it was clear that the CPA was a fragile agreement that left many issues unresolved and would require strong international stewardship and guarantors. Further, the CPA was never envisioned as an end goal. It was intended rather to address the most pressing axis of conflict between north and south at the time and, more importantly, to set in motion a process of transformation at the national level to make the government more inclusive, transparent, and accountable to Sudan's many marginalized populations. In the 52 years since Sudan's independence, the country has known only 11 years of relative peace. Absent a fundamental transformation, conflict, rather than peace, will remain the norm.

Q3: What is the link between the CPA and efforts to resolve the crisis in Darfur?

A3: The brutality and human devastation of the conflict in Darfur have understandably drawn most of the international community's attention in Sudan. The conflict in Darfur is, however, only a symptom of Sudan's larger crisis of governance, one that pits an authoritarian regime in Khartoum against regions that have never been politically or economically integrated. The CPA begins to address that central challenge, but much more work is needed. U.S. policymakers, activists, and the international community should use their energy and leverage to ensure that the agreement does not fail. If the CPA dissolves, Darfur will not be Sudan's last upheaval.

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