

Darfur and South Sudan: United in Struggle, Divided by Future?

Written by Hagar Taha

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HAGAR TAHA, SEP 9 2011

It was a funeral-like day in Khartoum. The official declaration of the independence of the South of Sudan, on the 9th of July, left a sense of bitter loss in the air. People walked down the streets looking as if they have lost someone dear. The only positive aspect was that they were blaming the policies of Sudan's consecutive governments in handling the conflict in the South, while wishing all the best to their Southern fellows.

Everyone in the North had a theory as to the cause. It generally involved blaming interest-based international intervention in the affairs of Sudan coupled with Sudanese governments that either did not know how to properly integrate the South or intentionally and systematically isolated it. But whatever their explanation of the tragedy, there was a sense of determination that this was never to happen again; that they will never allow further disintegration of the Sudan into smaller states. Here, the questions of the Nuba Mountains, South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Darfur come to mind. Thus, there is an urge now, on a social as well as political level, to settle the Darfur question lest it eventually goes down the same route as the South. But the question here is whether Darfur can actually be compared at all with the South; is separation even an option for ending the conflict?

The South Struggle: Tragic Civil Wars

The South question started even before the independence of Sudan in 1956 with one civil war that extended from 1955 to 1972, and another that started in 1983 and ended with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Government of Sudan (GoS) and the Sudan Liberation Movement (SPLM/A) in Nairobi in 2005. During the Anglo-Egyptian rule of the Sudan until 1946, both the British and the Egyptian governments administered south and north Sudan as separate regions but slowly, and eventually, started to deal with them as one entity. This move created fear in the South – which is predominantly inhabited by Christians and animists and considers itself to be culturally sub-Saharan – that they would be isolated in a political system controlled by the North – which is predominantly Muslim and views itself as Arabic. The result was tension between the South and the North as the declaration of independence approached and no signs of power sharing seemed to be on the horizon.

The first civil war led to the death of about five hundred thousand people while many hundreds of thousands were internally displaced or forced to leave as refugees. The Addis Ababa Agreement ended this war in March 1972 by granting the Southerners a single administrative region with various defined powers, but it seemed to be only a temporary pause in the unrest between the North and the South because, within a decade, another tragic war started resulting in the death of about two million people and the displacements of about four million. The CPA, which ended this second war, provided the Southerners with two options: either they would remain within a united Sudan, or establish their own independent state. The decision would be determined in a referendum scheduled for January 2011. Eventually, the South and the North went separate ways on the 9th of July of the same year and an independent state for the Southern Sudanese was established.

The South Secession: Determining Factors

It is important to note three determining factors that led the Southern conflict to unfold in the manner it did; first is the

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unity of the Southern rebellion movement. Starting with uncoordinated insurgency in Southern rural areas in 1955 as a reaction to oppression and marginalization of the North, the insurgents gradually developed into a secessionist movement composed of rebels and southern students; Anyanya. In 1971, former army lieutenant Joseph Lagu gathered all the guerilla bands under his Southern Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM) which was the first unified body for Southern secessionists. Later, in 1983, and upon the GoS's abandonment of the Addis Ababa Agreement, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) was established as a continuation of the secessionist ideals with Joseph Oduho as chairman and Colonel John Garang as a commander, and later on its leader.

The SPLM/A continued to be the sole representative of the Southerners and their demands for separation, meaning that the southern struggle was integrated in unified body, unified leadership and unified demands, although a notable exception is the Anyanya II, but this group was eventually and many its members incorporated into the SPLM/A. This has strengthened its influence on the Sudanese political scene and eventually meant the call for an independent state was both understandable and plausible.

This leads to the second determining factor in the South secession which is the fact that, during its struggle which is almost as long as the history of post-independent Sudan itself, the South had one clear demand; separation. They did not see themselves historically or culturally part of the North and had expected independence ever since the British rule was over. This clear vision of their future also added to the strength of the secessionist claim and as independence was the sole demand by the South, it only made sense that they eventually separate in an independent state.

But both unity of rebellion and demands would not have been feasible without regional and international support for the secession of the South, which is the third determining factor which led to separation. The role of the US, the European Union and the United Nations has been crucial in supporting the Southern quest for independence, especially in relation to the worsening of the humanitarian situation and with the Sudanese government escalating its attacks on the Southern opposition. With the development of the second civil war as it seemed clear that self determination seems the only viable option for settling the Southern question Anyanya.

Darfur: Another Marginalized Periphery

As with the struggle of South Sudan, the Darfur conflict has a long history. The Fur Sultanate was established in 1650 and was annexed to the Sudan by the Turks in 1874, but Sultan Ali Dinar made it independent once again in 1898 until it was annexed by the Anglo-Egyptian rule in 1916. In the period from 1916 to 1956, Darfur was ruled mainly through Native Administration which was supervised by the British occupiers. But ever since Sudanese independence, there has been unrest in Darfur. From 1956 to 1980, the conflicts were mainly between local tribes over limited resources. Between 1983 and 1993, the nature of conflict changed to include tribal ethnic groups, Chadian movements and central government. Then, in the period from 1992 to 2002, the ethnic dimension of the conflict grew and, with the interference of the government, it developed from local to national level.[i]

But many of the people in Darfur argue that the roots of the 2003 conflict started when Omar Bashir, with his National Salvation Government and his National Conference Party, came to power on the 30th of June 1989. This is because his Islamization and Arabization policies fed the conflict with ideological and ethnic rationales, dividing the people between Arabs and *Zurqa* (Black), and eventually provoking the rebels to take up arms against the government forming the Darfur Liberation Movement (DLM). The DLM developed into the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) – led by Abdul Wahid al Nur of the Fur and Minni Minnawi of the Zaghawa – and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) – led by Dr. Khalil Ibrahim of the Zaghawa.

There is no general agreement on the exact number of people who have been killed in the latest eruption of conflict in Darfur, but the Centre for Research on Epidemiology of Disasters published an article entitled *Patterns of mortality rates in Darfur Conflict* which estimated that the excess number of deaths is between 178,258 and 461,520, with 80% of these due to worsening humanitarian conditions[ii].

Darfur and South Sudan: Fault Lines

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There are indeed factors that place Darfur and South Sudan in the same category of 'marginalized periphery'. The two regions have suffered for decades from neglect of the center, which always viewed itself as Arab and later on as Muslim, systematically undermining areas that did not fit into this categorization including the South, Darfur, Blue Nile, Kordofan, Nuba Mountains and to some extent the East. The cultural and social marginalization led to economic and political marginalization and these peripheries have come to be defined by poverty and underdevelopment, witnessing their rich resources transferred to the ruling elite in Khartoum without receiving equal political participation and representation. This pattern has led to many rebellions and secessionist movements across Sudan since its independence. But though these rebellions share almost the same underlying cause, they have not unfolded in the same manner, they do not have the same demands or share the same future. Darfur and South Sudan are a case in point.

Though Darfur and South Sudan share the same history of marginalization and underdevelopment, there are differences that mean the separation of Darfur is far from the most favorable or viable option from the perspective of either the rebels or the government.

Firstly, there is no unified rebellion movement in Darfur. Though the recent rebellion started with two main movements, JEM and SLA, these disintegrated into many other sub-movements each having their own leadership and demands and their own mechanisms of negotiating with the government. This dynamic is perhaps not surprising when one considers that organized rebellion against the government is a recent phenomenon in Darfur, while conflict between tribes and underdevelopment both have long roots in the region.

Besides, there has never been an agreement among the rebellion movements that separation should be a sought objective. For example, JEM's 'Black Book', outlines its reasoning for starting an organized rebellion against the government. It mainly tackles imbalances of wealth and power in the Sudan, but never mentions a plan for separation; rather a desire of integration and development. One of the reasons behind this desire for integration may lie in predominant identities in Darfur. The majority of people in Darfur view themselves as Muslim; an identity which is emphasized by the ruling elite as part of the broader Sudanese identity. As a result, their sense of belonging to the Sudan was never completely cut off, unlike the South. Even after the government of Sudan had armed Arab tribes (Janjaweed) against rebels who are predominantly non-Arabs, the Darfur people and the rebels still demand and fight for integration and not separation. The Muslim identity allowed for inter-marriage between Darfur's people and those from the North which created a generation of Darfuris mixed socially and culturally with the rest of Sudan. Also, all of the tribes of Sudan are represented in Darfur which ties the Darfuri identity even more with that of the Sudan.

In addition, after a bitter fight with the South to separate, which has consumed the political and economic resources of regional and international players and will yet consume more in support of the newly born state, it seems that there is no will or support for yet another weak and underdeveloped state to be born in the region. The international and regional pressure is directed towards peacemaking with Darfur rebel groups along the lines of more development and political representation. In that sense, the option of self determination is rarely discussed, and when it's ever so, it's usually dismissed as an impractical and undesired option for all parties involved.

Conclusion

The Darfur conflict is yet another devastating Sudanese rivalry between the core and the periphery resulting in a humanitarian crisis for hundreds of thousands of people through killing, displacement and loss of resources. Though two peace processes were perused, resulting in the signing of another Darfur Peace Agreement in May 2011, the conflict is far from finally settled. The option for Darfur now remains to pressure the Sudanese government to make a democratic transition in which the system allows more space and representation for peripheries from all over Sudan; not only Darfur. This would allow resources for development to flow evenly from the centre to deprived regions which have been systematically cut off from the political system while being used for economic gains for decades[iii].

[i] Musa, Abdu Mokhtar. *Darfur: Min Azmat Dawlah ila Sira' Al Qwa Al Uzmah* – Darfur: From a State's Crisis to a Rivalry between Great Powers, Khartoum: Dar Azza for Publishing (in Arabic), 2010.

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[ii] Degomme, Olivier and Debarati Guha-Sapir. "Patterns of mortality rates in Darfur conflict," *The Lancet*, Vol.375, Issue 9711, P. 294 – 300, 23 January 2010.

[iii] Adam, Ahmed Hussein. "The Secession of South Sudan and Its Impact on Darfur: Time for a New Direction," *Sudan Tribune*, 30 May 2011 < <http://www.sudantribune.com/The-Secession-of-South-Sudan-and,39066>>, accessed on: 24 August 2011.

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