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SHLOMO BEN-AMI

The bigger issue in Sudan

The most immediate result of the arrest warrant issued for Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir by the International Criminal Court last month was the expulsion of most aid agencies from the country. But this global focus on Sudan's Darfur region, though justified, has overshadowed

an even more vital issue: sustaining the quest for a broader peace in all of Sudan. What is most needed now is to build an international consensus on a strategy to implement fully the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) for Sudan.

The CPA ended Africa's longest civil war, which had left behind over two million dead. That agreement not only contains benchmarks that should lead to self-determination for Sudan's South; it also spells out a democratization process in Sudan itself. After all, the oppressive nature of the regime in Khartoum is at the root of the many conflicts that have torn the country apart.

If the government in Khartoum persists in undermining the reform process and derailing the referendum on self-determination promised for the South in January 2011, a return to full-scale civil war, with calamitous consequences for the peoples of Sudan and the entire region, is a real possibility.

The commitment of Sudan's government to the CPA has always been equivocal. Indeed, since the civil war's end in 2005, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in the South has frequently had to confront militias that operate as government proxies. Moreover, Sudanese security forces continue to arm Arab tribes straddling the North-South border with the aim of destabilizing the mostly Christian South.

The arrest warrant for al-Bashir should not be allowed to spur further attempts by his government to sabotage the CPA and the fragile process leading to the 2011 referendum. Nor should the international neglect that has for too long allowed the Darfur

genocide to go unpunished recur when it comes to sustaining the quest for peace in Sudan.

The South's drive for independence has gained momentum because of the North's failure to make unity attractive through reform and elections, as stipulated by the CPA. A second factor pushing secession forward is the SPLA's lack of commitment

continued disengagement by the international community might doom the prospects for peace. The Government of Southern Sudan suffers from serious financial constraints, owing to unrealistic assumptions about its oil revenues. As a result, its ability to maintain services - and the military capacity to respond to any maneuver by the Khartoum government aimed

security guarantees for South Sudan be given in order to deter renewal of the civil war.

Financial assistance is of course vital, but the political commitment of the international community just as important. For example, although the United Nations Mission in Sudan is supposed to monitor implementation of the CPA, Darfur has practically monopolized its attention. Moreover, whatever monitoring taking place is rarely followed by action.

The secession of a Southern Sudanese Christian state from Muslim country, a major member of the Arab League, would have far-reaching strategic implications. China, a close ally of the government in Khartoum, is not carefully weighing its oil interests and its strategic concerns in the South. A high-powered Russian delegation recently arrived in Juba, the South Sudanese capital, with the proclaimed aim of "playing a more active role on the African continent." And Japan, a major consumer of Middle East oil, has recently invited President Kiir to Tokyo.

Sadly missing in this diplomatic action is the European Union. International law and the indictment of war criminals are important for a civilized world order, but they are no substitute for active financial and political engagement to support internationally legitimate, and urgently needed, peace accords such as the CPA in Sudan.

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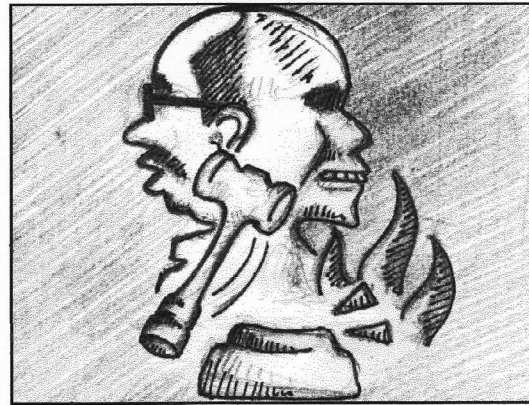


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to the New Sudan ideology of its founder, John Garang, who had negotiated the CPA and died in a plane crash in 2005.

Garang fought for a united, secular, and democratic Sudan, a lofty dream that the Islamist regime in Khartoum admittedly has had no intention of implementing. Self-determination for the South has thus become the only practical way out of the country's dilemma, and one fully consistent with the 2005 peace agreement.

Because the North possesses the capacity, but not the political will, to implement the CPA, and the South has the will but not the capacity,

against the peace agreement - is seriously compromised.

Only the United States appears to be committed to creating the conditions needed to implement the CPA. President George W. Bush, who twice received Southern Sudanese president Salva Kiir at the White House, approved a program in 2006 to transform the SPLA into a professional army. More recently, leading American congressmen have been impressing on President Barack Obama the need for a muscular effort to implement the CPA. Recommendations presented recently to the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee, suggested that

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