

# AFRICA

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## Resolving the Three Headed War from Hell in Southern Sudan, Northern Uganda, and Darfur

By John Prendergast, Special Advisor to the President  
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### **An Introduction from Program Director Howard Wolpe:**

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The concurrent crises in southern Sudan, Darfur, and northern Uganda have not occurred in a vacuum. Indeed, the current policy of trifurcation—of dealing with each separately—may ensure that war will continue in all three places. The Sudanese

regime is adept at using one conflict to stoke the fire of another, and has often exploited the international community's tendency to focus on one conflict at a time rather than taking a holistic regional approach.

Khartoum's support for the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda further destabilized southern Sudan and opened up a southern front against the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). The most commonly adopted school of thought mistakenly likens the historic Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Government of Sudan and the SPLM to a silver bullet that will solve the region's other major conflicts. Khartoum's tactics have cynically used the promise of peace in the south to relieve diplomatic pressure to end the killing in Darfur. In point of fact, however, there is nothing comprehensive about the CPA. The evolving process will not yield a comprehensive result without careful consideration and policy decisions that recognize the potential for conflicts in Darfur and northern Uganda to spoil the peace brought about by the CPA and to drag the entire region further into conflict.

If we are going to achieve peace in the region through progress on all three fronts—successful implementation of the CPA, a lasting peace settle-

ment in Darfur, and an end to conflict in northern Uganda—we need to deal with the three in a comprehensive way that ties and coordinates the processes together in a more focused and deliberate manner.

### **Southern Sudan — Opportunity Fraught with Peril**

In southern Sudan, where 30 times as many people have died in the course of 21 years of civil war than during the nearly two years of armed conflict in Darfur, the final signing of a comprehensive peace deal on January 9, 2005 is undoubtedly an important achievement. Under the auspices of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the government and the SPLM have reached a complex, detailed agreement with real security guarantees. It gives unity a chance while at the same time protecting Southern Sudanese and the people of the Nuba Mountains, Southern Blue Nile and Abyei from the possibility of being double crossed by the ruling National Congress Party. The CPA is a step forward, but the euphoria in Sudan and within the diplomatic circles which guided the parties toward the final deal is premature.

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The CPA presents us with a tremendous opportunity to forge a lasting peace in Sudan and Uganda, but the manner in which this deal is implemented over the coming weeks and months—the priorities set, the mechanisms created, the decisions made—carry enormous consequences for peace prospects in the region. The regime in Khartoum has multiple agendas but one overriding goal: maintaining power at all costs. Threatened on many fronts, the government makes tactical decisions that further the long-term strategy of power and control, with dire consequences for peace prospects in Darfur and northern Uganda.

From a strategic point of view, the regime in Khartoum signed the CPA partly to deflect further international pressure over its ongoing military activities and systematic atrocities in Darfur. In November, when the UN Security Council met in Nairobi to push the IGAD process towards a swift conclusion, the regime sensed an extraordinary opportunity. By agreeing to sign a deal by the end of the year, Khartoum effectively held the carrot of peace in front of the noses of the international community while it wielded the stick in Darfur. In effect, the government had a free hand in Darfur in late November and throughout December, which it used for offensive military operations. The extension of this state of impunity was sought successfully through the signing of the CPA. The regime hoped for and received a measure of international goodwill, and has used its new breathing space to increase attacks in Darfur and to further undermine the activity of opposition groups throughout the country.

Regardless of what the regime's pen puts to paper, its central strategic and tactical objective is to remain in power by whatever means necessary. Through behavior patterns to which Sudan watchers have become accustomed, in order to confuse outsiders and defuse criticism, the regime pursues seemingly contradictory approaches in different parts of the country and with different elements of the opposition. It is a divide and conquer/divide and confuse strategy that has helped keep this isolated government in power for so long.

Examining the deal reached between the SPLM and the government, the implementation period of six and a half years before the referendum will be rife with opportunities for spoilers to steer the parties to renewed confrontation and conflict. The biggest potential spoilers in this process are the parties themselves or, rather, elements within the SPLM and government that oppose peace in the South and a united Sudan. Hard-line elements within the regime will obstruct this agreement principally through tactics designed to divide its adversaries. Despite the joy that erupted in the South and in the camps for internally displaced persons around Khartoum on January 9, most southerners remain deeply distrustful of the central

government, and many are skeptical about the real prospects for long term peace in a united Sudan. Regime hard-liners, especially those within the military, military intelligence, and internal security services, will look to exploit existing and latent intra-South divisions to sow South-South conflict, a strategy that worked well for the regime throughout the 1990s. Elections in the South could afford these elements within the regime the opportunity to pit ethnic groups against one another and thus discredit the Southern Government as a force for unity. Additionally, violent pro-government militia groups are simmering beneath the surface and could easily be revived or reconstituted to destabilize southern Sudan.

The government in Khartoum is not the only potential spoiler in the South. The SPLM itself has tremendous capacity issues that must be quickly addressed if this peace deal has any realistic chance of holding together. The SPLM's ability to fill key posts within the Southern Government and unresolved internal leadership issues could quickly scuttle any advances made. Disparate southern armies—largely ethnically based—fought internally throughout the 1990s, and if the SPLM-dominated Government of Southern Sudan cannot deliver quickly on the promises made throughout the IGAD process, discontent could quickly grow among groups who do not experience the benefits of peace.

Furthermore, the autocratic decision-making style of the SPLM, while well suited for running an armed rebellion, may not translate into a transparent manner of governance. As SPLM Chairman John Garang assumes the position of Vice President and begins to maneuver his way through the halls of power in Khartoum, the potential for poor governance and corruption in southern Sudan should not be underestimated. The wealth-sharing agreements in the CPA and the expected influx of significant aid dollars and investment will sweeten the pot for the many constituencies throughout the South. Just as northerners are reluctant to share wealth and power with the South, factionalism in the South and the perception of entitlement among certain groups could bedevil the next six years.

### Northern Uganda — Opportunity for the Taking

The momentum of the peace deal in Southern Sudan has had ripple effects on the war in northern Uganda, and we see the best chance for peace in eighteen years of brutal conflict. The recent effectiveness of the Ugandan People's Defense Forces (UPDF) in combating the LRA and the Government of Sudan's recent reduction of direct support for LRA activities have diminished the LRA's capacity to operate freely in northern Uganda. Despite the seeming intractability of the conflict, the international community has an opportunity in Uganda that it must take if we are to achieve real peace in the region.

Crucial in determining whether northern Uganda achieves a lasting and sustainable peace are the motivations and strategy of LRA leader Joseph Kony. Largely an enigma, Kony's actions appear to be grounded in his belief—or delusion—that he is acting out God's will in northern Uganda. Kony sees himself as a Moses-like figure, sent by God on a mission to bring the Ten Commandments to a society that is blind to his vision. He is bound by divine will to lead his people to the Promised Land, which he defines as an ethnically pure Acholi state, and to topple the democratically elected government of President Yoweri Museveni. Those Acholi who reject Kony's vision—and nearly all Acholi **do** reject it—are branded “collaborators” by the LRA and punished as such. Kony's distorted and grotesque view of the Old Testament—literally an eye for an eye—is a recipe for human rights violations on a macabre scale. Kony, his few disciples, and an army composed principally of children abducted and forced to fight on Kony's behalf, have brought his vision of the Ten Commandments to northern Ugandans through systematic abductions, torture, mutilation, rape, and murder that have wreaked psychological havoc throughout northern Uganda and displaced over one and a half million people. Driven by messianic fervor, it remains to be seen whether Kony is capable of negotiating for an end to the conflict.



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Although the scale of civilian displacement has steadily increased, and the humanitarian situation for hundreds of thousands of civilians remains dreadful, Kony and the LRA are on the ropes. LRA fighters—mostly abducted child soldiers held hostage by sadistic commanders—exist right now in survival mode. The LRA conducts hit and run attacks to steal food and abduct children to replace fighters who have been killed or who have managed to escape. And yet although the force strength and morale of the rank and file seem to be at a low point, the LRA has time and again demonstrated a capacity to rise from the ashes. Kony and his followers' ability to terrorize the civilian population of northern Uganda—spawning a generation of children living in daily fear of abduction—cannot be underestimated, and it is unlikely that the LRA will simply disappear until Kony is killed or captured. He is constantly rearming, refitting, repositioning, and reorganizing his forces to continue the war at all costs. Kony's demise would certainly cause the LRA to unravel—much as UNITA disintegrated with the death of Jonas Savimbi—but waiting for one bullet to make the difference will only condemn more Ugandans to their fate as victims of his violent campaign.

In light of the present weakness of the LRA, the UPDF must continue to pursue a policy of sustained military pressure on elements within the LRA that do not support a peace process. However, a purely military solution to conflict in northern Uganda carries several negative consequences. First, prolonged military action in northern Uganda would kill hundreds, possibly thousands, more LRA child soldiers, most of whom only fight to avoid certain death at the hands of their captors. Second, the purely military solution and the additional destruction and carnage that accompany it would only add to the already tremendous cost of physical reconstruction and psychological healing. A violent and drawn-out end to the conflict would make reconciliation much more difficult both among the Acholi and between the Acholi and the government. Third, as military operations whittle away the number of LRA child soldiers, the hard-line LRA commanders will remain ensconced in the bush, posing no strategic threat to the government of Uganda while cre-

ating a life of continued misery and a literal hell on earth for their people.

Though the military solution has substantial pitfalls, there is resistance to a diplomatic solution within both the LRA and the government of Uganda. Hard-line elements within the government adamantly believe that Kony will never make peace, and remain convinced, after eighteen years of war, that the UPDF has the upper hand and is nearing an historic victory. Die-hards within the LRA view peace negotiations as a trap, and remain equally convinced that their leader and his divine war will eventually overthrow the government of Uganda. Beyond the ideological rationale for the conflict, elements of both sides have benefited from war either through accrued economic gains or political capital that could erode in the event of a peace deal. Just as worrying, and despite promises to the contrary, hard-liners within the regime in Khartoum still see the LRA's war with Uganda as a means of destabilizing southern Sudan. For those in Khartoum and elsewhere who are opposed to the CPA, the LRA remains a willing and eager ally.

How, then, to build a peace process from scratch in the context of messianic insurgency, chronic mistrust, and meddlesome neighbors? Though prospects for a negotiated peace seem bleak, the international community is presented with a number of feasible options. First and foremost, patience is essential in bringing this brutal conflict to an end. As in the IGAD negotiations, the parties will not come to the table overnight, but the gathering momentum of a peace process—and especially a ceasefire—will enable a creative dynamic to emerge between the two parties.

Second, international support for a northern Ugandan peace process must be less rhetorical and more concrete. As the troika for southern Sudan of Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States demonstrated, strong commitment of diplomatic energy and political capital can move pens to paper, however tenuous that agreement may turn out to be. The Bush Administration's strong focus on peace in southern Sudan, demonstrated through the appointment of a Presidential Envoy and frequent trips to the region by administration officials, was a



significant factor in achieving the peace deal. Similar attention on the conflict in Uganda, especially when tied to securing long term peace in southern Sudan, is crucial for any forward diplomatic movement by either the LRA or Kampala.

Along these lines, the international community—especially the United States—must rally around the mediation efforts of the Ugandan, Betty Bigombe. The troika of Norway, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom are providing direct support to the Bigombe mediation, but a senior envoy from the United States traveling regularly to the region would reinforce the U.S. government's commitment to peace in the region. Further, a special envoy would reinforce the diplomacy of the U.S. mission and provide President Museveni with a constructive partner with real influence in Washington. Together, the Ambassador and the envoy could confront hard-line elements in Museveni's government to underline the political, economic, and social rationales for a diplomatic settlement. In addition, an envoy would reassure LRA leaders of the legitimacy of the diplomatic process, and explain that a peaceful solution to the conflict would diminish the possibility of immediate prosecution by the United States. (The LRA currently appears on the U.S. Government's list of terrorist organizations.)

Third, pressures and incentives must be constructed and coordinated that focus on the LRA, the Ugandan Government, and the Government of Sudan. International support is needed for neutral monitoring of the assembly points in any agreed ceasefire; for expanded assistance to disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) activities; and for increased and sustained humanitarian assistance for Ugandan civilians affected by the conflict.

Finally, the international community's collective efforts to consolidate the peace in southern Sudan will have a significant positive impact on chances for peace in northern Uganda. A power vacuum in southern Sudan would be disastrous not just for peace in Sudan, but for the entire region. A Government of Southern Sudan with strong institutional capacity and regional awareness will be a bulwark against possible LRA resurgence. The international force that deploys to southern Sudan must pri-

oritize monitoring the resumption of Khartoum's supply lines to the LRA. The LRA has been a proven ally to the government of Sudan in the overall destabilization of southern Sudan for the past ten years, and a resurgent LRA would have calamitous effects on the potential for lasting regional peace.

### Darfur — Opportunities Missed and Lives Lost

Despite all of the international attention Darfur has received, including the United States government's declaration of genocide, the regime's campaign to cleanse rural Darfur of non-Arab groups is virtually complete. Human rights groups and humanitarian organizations have documented the initial campaign and the systematic human rights abuses involved in driving more than 2.1 million people from their homes in eighteen months. Less well understood is the current phase of the conflict: the mop-up operation. Khartoum has proven itself to be one step ahead of the international community throughout the Darfur crisis and seven signs point to continued death and destruction in western Sudan.

First, and most obvious, the various ceasefire agreements have been completely ignored by all parties to the conflict. The April 8 ceasefire signed in N'djamena, cautiously hailed as a major breakthrough by negotiators, was a failure from the outset. The ink on the paper was barely dry when govern-

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ment forces and their proxy Janjaweed militia resumed their attacks against rebel and civilian targets in all three states of Darfur. The two main opposition groups at the time—the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)—quickly returned to the battlefield as well, knowing full well that the international community lacked the mechanisms to maintain even the most fragile ceasefire. African Union (AU) forces deployed to the region to monitor the ceasefire found them-

selves overwhelmed with reports of violations, and monitoring took a backseat to verifying reports of atrocities committed by both sides. Subsequent agreements signed are worth less than the paper they were printed on, and fighting continues unabated in Darfur. A government offensive has pushed opposition forces eastwards towards the oil-rich state of Western Kordofan, raising the stakes of the conflict and the likelihood that the regime will respond to rebel attacks with even more draconian measures.

Second, the Janjaweed militia groups are once again the regime's deadly instrument of choice, and militia attacks are increasing. Government forces continue to provide fixed wing and helicopter air support for its proxy militias to ravage what remains of village life in Darfur. Despite increasingly feeble calls by the international community to arrest and disarm these militias, the government has

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yet to disarm a single Janjaweed, much less arrest a Janjaweed for the looting, rape, or murder of an unarmed civilian. The climate of impunity is very much intact despite the international community's mutterings over how best to punish the perpetrators of genocide.

Third, the rape, looting, and murder of civilians have steadily increased since September, and security is getting worse, not better, for the traumatized civilian population. In abdicating the state's monopoly of violence to semi-autonomous Arab militia groups, Khartoum has managed to nudge latent societal tensions towards vicious conclusions while maintaining a degree of separation from the most blatant atrocities and pleading its innocence to a credulous international community.

Fourth, the regime has been on a weapons buying spree for the past few months, indicating that

peace is far from the first thing on Khartoum's mind. As an impotent Security Council dithers about the scope of an arms embargo, the military is vigorously strengthening its hand. Even as it embarked on peace negotiations with opposition groups in Abuja, Nigeria, Khartoum launched a military offensive in Darfur under the guise of "road clearing." Away from the main roads, Government forces and the Janjaweed bombed civilian targets, looted villages, and displaced additional tens of thousands of civilians. The regime continues to flaunt its blatant disregard for any of its international commitments. The government of Sudan is fully aware of the tools that the international community has at its disposal, and is also aware of just how unwilling we are to apply them.

Fifth, as the specter of famine looms, the government is once again restricting humanitarian access to the most vulnerable populations. As the UN ominously warned in April 2004, a policy of deliberate starvation of civilians is an effective tool for achieving genocidal objectives. Manipulation of humanitarian assistance is a hallmark of Khartoum's counterinsurgency strategy, and the "slow motion genocide" that so many in the human rights community have predicted is nearing reality. Bureaucratic restrictions on humanitarian access have fallen by the wayside as the tool of choice, as relief agencies are increasingly restricted in their movements by the increasing unpredictability of the violence. This lack of access combined with consecutive poor harvests, collapse of regional and local economies, rising food prices, and exhausted coping mechanisms is causing many in the relief community to predict a famine if the situation does not dramatically and quickly improve.

Sixth, rebel groups are increasingly disorganized and fragmented as the regime's divide and conquer strategy has succeeded in upsetting the uneasy alliances forged in the early days of the conflict. Though the SLA, and to a lesser extent the JEM, remain the major opposition players, these groups look more and more fragile internally just at the moment that they need to be demonstrating strength on the battlefield and at the negotiating table. The most alarming trend is the increasing

breakdown of command and control, and the recent murder of two humanitarian workers by SLA soldiers. As UN officials have warned and as regime officials planned, Darfur is sliding towards anarchy unless a peace process takes hold and the parties engage in substantive negotiations to stop the violence.

The seventh sign that things will get much worse before they get better in Darfur is the complete lack of commitment of the parties to engage in serious negotiations. Khartoum has appointed Vice President Ali Osman Taha to take the lead on Darfur, but genuine commitment by the parties to negotiate and by the international community to push forcefully for a peaceful solution to the conflict remain sorely lacking. Recent rounds of talks in Abuja were barely off the ground before the parties stormed off to their respective corners and ended any chance for meaningful dialogue.

Darfur is in danger of drifting from the international radar screen, with little comprehension by the world of the broader implications for continued carnage. The effects of 100 days of slaughter in Rwanda in 1994 are still reverberating throughout Central Africa, and Darfur could have similar a similar effect on peace and stability in Sudan and beyond.

Three priorities must be immediately stressed for Darfur. First and foremost is the immediate protection of the civilian population through whatever means necessary. Ideally, the mandate of the AU force must be expanded to explicitly include civilian protection, and the number of boots on the ground must be rapidly increased and given the logistical capacity to maintain constant patrols aimed at stopping the violence. NATO should supplement force levels once the mandate is strengthened. The second priority is war crimes accountability, either through the International Criminal Court (ICC) or a quickly agreed upon alternative. The third priority, and the only solution to finally ending the horror, is a negotiated peace agreement. Efforts thus far have failed miserably, and the peace process needs to be revamped and reinvigorated. The IGAD process for the CPA can serve as a model, but nothing will move forward without increased international attention, including the

much needed appointment of a presidential envoy to the region that can not only force the issue in Darfur, but work within a broader regional context to consolidate peace in the South and end the war in northern Uganda.

### **Tying it All Together — A Regional Peace Policy**

In constructing a more regionally coordinated U.S. and multilateral strategy aimed at bringing peace to Darfur, southern Sudan and northern Uganda, there are five areas of particular focus.

First, more sustained, higher level diplomacy is needed. A Special Envoy should be appointed by the Bush administration that focuses on gaining agreements in Darfur and northern Uganda and implementing the CPA. The Envoy should have appropriate staff and resources, and liaise with counterparts in Africa and Europe.

Second, civilian protection must become a higher priority throughout the region. The Africa Union mission in Darfur and the forthcoming peace observation mission in southern Sudan should make civilian protection their central mandate, and diplomatic and aid efforts should focus on protection in northern Uganda as well.

Third, security sector reform should be a regional focus of United States policy. Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of ex-LRA and combatants in Sudan will be crucial, as will be the provision of support for restructured armies and intelligence reform.

Fourth, the United States should work assiduously with other donors to provide a peace dividend in support of regional peace efforts. This includes the provision of humanitarian, development, and private sector resources.

Finally, accountability must be at the core of continuing U.S. efforts in the region. The cycle of impunity must be broken. This will require careful attention to the political impact on peace prospects of efforts to end the culture of impunity and to re-establish some sense of justice and the rule of law. Each case requires a nuanced effort. One size does not fit all. The ultimate objective must be peace with justice, an ideal end-state that will not be easy to achieve.



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