



## Policy Forum Report **May 3, 2012**

### ***Background***

On May 3, 2012, the International Center for Religion & Diplomacy (ICRD) and American Muslims for Constructive Engagement (AMCE) convened a Policy Forum for key Congressional and Executive Branch staff and selected representatives of the American Muslim community to discuss the current situation in Sudan. The following is a summary of the views expressed and insights that emerged from that discussion.

### ***Historical Divisions***

Under British and Egyptian colonial rule, there was little contact between the predominantly Arab Muslim northern region of Sudan and the predominantly Black Christian/African Traditionalist South. Travel was restricted, while religious and linguistic differences divided much of the population. Shortly following independence in 1956, the first civil war broke out and concluded in the 1972 Adis Ababba Accords, an agreement facilitated by the World Council of Churches and the All-Africa Council of Churches. These Accords, however, came to be seen as an agreement between elites, with nothing done to cement new understandings at the grassroots level. Accordingly, a second north-south civil war broke out in 1983 for precisely the same reasons as the first. Among these was the forced implementation of shariah law (rather than any dispute over oil, which was largely undeveloped at that time). Finally, in 2005, the Government of Sudan and the Sudan's People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) signed a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) ending the conflict. On July 9, 2011 the southern region became the independent and sovereign Republic of South Sudan.

### ***Current North-South Relations***

While Sudan's acknowledgment of South Sudan's independence is significant, tensions—such as those manifested in the clashes over the oil-producing town of Heglig—continue between the two nations, creating the risk of yet another war. Disputes continue regarding the distribution of oil income and the transport of oil—for example, Sudan has sequestered oil being transported through its territory from South Sudan based on claims that the South has not paid the necessary transport fees since its secession in 2011. In response, South Sudan has discontinued sending oil, with both countries now feeling the economic consequences. Such tensions are complicated by issues not addressed in the CPA (such as the status of former SPLA fighters), parts of the CPA that have not been implemented, and the CPA's expiration in 2011.

A May 3, 2012 UN Security Council Resolution ordered the two nations to resume peace talks under the auspices of African Union (AU) mediators or face international sanctions. The resolution called for negotiations to be concluded by August on critical issues such as oil arrangements and payments, the status of each state's nationals living in the other country, the resolution of disputed border areas, and agreement on the final status of the contested region of Abyei.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In June, the UN Security Council welcomed the resumption of negotiations between the two countries, while voicing concern over the implementation of measures aimed at reducing tensions.

### ***Internal Tensions***

Internal tensions within Sudan complicate relations with South Sudan. Some participants spoke of a campaign of fear and detention against those who speak against the government in Khartoum, including suppression of freedom of speech and assembly, and censorship of the media and the internet. All of this limits the prospects for any kind of “Arab Spring” in Sudan.

President Bashir has been accused of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes in Darfur, and was the first sitting head of state to be indicted by the International Criminal Court. His rule has been destabilized by distrust of the legitimacy of his election by some and by the allegation in a Wikileaks cable that he had stolen \$9 billion from the Treasury, which led to a backlash from National Congress Party members, Islamists, and even some senior military generals. Despite this, the participants felt that Bashir is unlikely to be removed from office any time soon, especially because of his close relationship with the military.

The members of the ruling National Congress Party (NCP), while not ideologically unified, are united by the perceived existential threat to their power and lives. According to some participants, the end of the CPA was the end of the NCP’s source of legitimacy, and so the NCP is retreating to alternative sources, which can be dangerous if misused, such as armed might and purported Islamic credentials. Some rhetoric has painted those against the government as being against Islam and thus characterized as infidels. The government has also held up “hardline” elements of society as the alternative to its rule in order to instill fear of regime change.

### ***Religious Intolerance and Extremism***

Historically, Khartoum has been a diverse melting pot of people and religious beliefs where all are welcome. However, inflammatory ethnic and religious rhetoric is increasing, and there is evidence that people are buying into this new, divisive mindset. For example, after one preacher stated that Sudan is an Islamic state and that building churches without the Islamic government’s approval is forbidden, a crowd of people burned down a church. Although, this need for permission has existed for quite some time, it is only now being turned into a political weapon. Some have advocated that after the South’s secession, churches should not be allowed at all in Sudan. Thus, the rhetoric can be both powerful and dangerous. A growing number of youth see Sudan as an Islamic state, which must be protected at all costs. Religious violence has also recently expanded from attacks on Christians to include fighting between Salafis and Sufis as well. Religious extremism in Sudan also has a regional impact, as the extremist Al-Shabaab movement in Somalia allegedly received some training in Sudan.

The above notwithstanding, religious leaders can also play a role in easing tensions and resolving disputes. For example, ICRD previously assisted Sudanese Muslim and Christian leaders in forming the Sudan Inter-religious Council (SIRC), which played a role in resolving various internal disputes as well as contributing to the signing of the CPA in 2005. As the SIRC has become less active in recent years, conflict in the country has worsened.

### ***Resources and Economic Challenges***

Some experts have estimated that in 2017, the Nile River’s outflow of water will exceed its inflow. Egypt, which controls the Nile River water rights along with Sudan based on a colonial

era treaty, is fearful that it will be left with receding water supplies. Add to this the fact that South Sudan might demand an additional share of the water now that it is independent and the constantly rising food prices in the region, regional stability could suffer accordingly. History shows a direct correlation between rising food prices and shrinking access to water on the one hand and the likelihood for violence and revolution on the other. Access to quality education for children is also a challenge in both Sudan and South Sudan.

### *Challenges for the United States*

Participants discussed the challenges of getting Africa in general on the Congressional “radar” and the US government’s challenge of balancing its resort to sanctions and providing incentives in its relationship with the government of Sudan. U.S. credibility suffers when it moves the goal posts on its commitments as happened in conjunction with the CPA. Earlier, the United States had indicated that if the North signed the CPA, it would relax the economic sanctions. About that same time, Darfur erupted and the United States kept the sanctions in place. Some on the Hill believe that Sudan has not shown sufficient progress to merit reward, citing continued violence in Darfur, provocations during and after the independence vote, the alleged funding and arming of anti-government militias in the South, and recent violence over the disputed border areas. Nevertheless, broken promises undermine trust, which only adds to the problem.

Finally, it was suggested that the United States should listen more to the voices of Sudanese youth activists, who are seeking encouragement from the outside as they attempt to organize peacefully and play a role in building democracy and civil society in Sudan.

\*The International Center for Religion & Diplomacy (ICRD) is a Washington-based NGO that prevents and resolves identity-based conflicts that exceed the reach of traditional diplomacy by incorporating religion as part of the solution. American Muslims for Constructive Engagement (AMCE) is an informal group of Muslim community leaders and scholars that seeks to foster a constructive partnership between the American Muslim community and the US Government for the purpose of advancing the national interest. The views expressed in this brief may not necessarily represent the views of ICRD or AMCE.