

Brief CV details of Gillian Ann Lusk, for Sudan Submission to the Associate Parliamentary Group.

Gillian Lusk has worked in or on Sudan since 1975, when she first went to the country. She stayed for twelve years, working first as an English teacher in Nyala (Darfur) and El Kamlin (Gezira). She then went to work as a copy writer at 'Sudan Now', at the Ministry of Culture and Information, going on to write articles for the magazine. She gradually went freelance, writing for media ranging from the BBC and Africa Confidential to Deutsche-Press Agentur, the Irish Times and the Times of London.

She returned to the United Kingdom in 1987 to become Deputy Editor of Africa Confidential, a fortnightly political newsletter. In 2006 she became freelance, writing mainly for Africa Confidential and writing and broadcasting for the BBC. She is Associate Editor of Africa Confidential and works on Sudan on a daily basis.

Summary of Submission to the Associate Parliamentary Group for Sudan, from Gillian Lusk. 31 October 2009.

Since my own area of specialisation is Northern Sudanese politics and since perhaps most of those in the international community interested in Sudan tend to focus on the South, I have written here mainly about the Khartoum government and its relationship to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005.

However, the most important reason for which I have focussed on the government is that it holds the CPA in its hands. Although the Sudan People's Liberation Movement holds power in the South, there is little it can do in the national centre of power, in Khartoum, to protect the CPA. Herein lies the rub, for the SPLM wants the CPA to succeed, as does the international community, while the dominant National Congress Party in Khartoum wants it to fail. If the CPA democratisation clauses are implemented, the NCP will lose power. If the referendum stipulation goes ahead, the NCP is likely to 'lose the South'. The issue therefore becomes one of how, if at all, the SPLM and the internationals can ensure implementation of the CPA.

I have therefore focussed on the role of the NCP for not only is that decisive for the future of the country and for peace within the country, it is the 'elephant in the room', that many in the international community (including my fellow journalists) fail not only to confront but even to mention.

Submission to the Associate Parliamentary Group for Sudan: Hearings on Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement from Gill Lusk, 28 October, 2009.

Introduction.

Over 34 years of working in and on Sudan have convinced me that to consider outside involvement, it is necessary first of all to be familiar with the object of that involvement, in other words, Sudan. This might sound obvious but I continue to find that it is not obvious to everyone who seeks a deep and potentially influential involvement in the country's affairs. Since my own usual focus is indeed on the Sudan, rather than the 'international community', and within that, on the country's politics, I shall address the Comprehensive Peace Agreement from that perspective. This inevitably brings in the issues of international engagement with the CPA and other issues mentioned in the APG Brief, including Darfur.

I shall begin with several issues that I consider key to understanding the current situation and therefore, I hope, to effective international engagement. I shall continue with an analysis of the ruling party, to indicate why it is crucial to the current situation. I shall end with some brief points about the elections and referenda.

1. Sudan's crises: the government as common factor

It is now being widely argued, including by the British and United States' governments, that

Sudan's crises should be tackled in a 'holistic' manner, rather than seeing, for example, Darfur and the South as separate issues.

The common factor in all Sudan's crises is the Sudanese government. Unless this is acknowledged in policy-making, the international community's contribution to resolving those crises will be limited.

2. Strengthening the signatories.

The CPA of 2005 has strengthened both its signatories, the National Congress Party (NCP, formerly National Islamic Front, NIF) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLM/SPLA). The SPLM dominates the Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS) and the NCP dominates the Government of National Unity (GNU) in Khartoum. If the return of democracy and human rights are among Western policy aims, the respective dominance of the two signatory parties has to be taken into account. This also raises the issue of the CPA's legal status if the NCP lost power: it is an internationally sponsored agreement between two political parties, not with any government.

3. Ending the North-South war.

The CPA is internationally seen as first and foremost ending the North-South war. It was widely assumed that both signatories wanted peace and this assertion is rarely questioned. While the SPLM has a clear interest in peace (in order to safeguard the referendum in 2011), the NCP has demonstrated, in the 20 years since it took power in a coup d'état, a clear pattern of using war as a strategy to control the country: war helps it to survive.

4. Democracy and the CPA.

The CPA contains sections on democratisation, the restoration of freedom of the press and other basic rights and freedoms. Foreign governments and non-governmental organisations are belatedly highlighting these aspects but tending to ignore that the main force obstructing them is the Khartoum regime.

5. The Southern referendum.

The 2011 referendum in the South on secession is now seen as crucial yet little attention is still being paid to what may happen afterwards, whether Southerners vote for national unity or, as is widely expected, for independence.

6. Ruling through the security organisation.

The CPA requires the Khartoum government to transform its security apparatus, now renamed as the National Intelligence and Security Service, into an information-gathering organ rather than one of enforcement. However, the NISS and its ancillary bodies are far more than a brutal security organisation, such as is found in many countries. It is the system through which the NCP holds power, as covert and organised as any of the world's secret services but also constituting a fully armed and equipped military service entirely separate from the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF). To ask the regime to dismantle it is to ask it to dismantle itself.

7. Rewriting the Darfur crisis.

The common assumption that the delay to a meaningful peace agreement in Darfur is due mainly to rebel divisions needs examining. This means looking at the history of the war again: this has been subject to a good deal of revisionism and the reasons for which the international community asked the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate war crimes have been swept under the carpet. Ignoring the causes and effects of the war helps to prevent its resolution.

8. The ICC indictments.

Britain and France took the lead in asking the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to ask the ICC to investigate possible crimes against humanity in Darfur. This would inevitably lead to the main perpetrator, the Khartoum government. Yet the international community in general, including NGOs and the media, has at best failed to support the Court and at the same time, failed to follow through the logic of these findings: that the government has to be a central issue in Sudan policy.

9. Islamism: Change and Containment.

The Islamist nature of the Khartoum regime is widely discounted abroad although when the NIF

(now NCP) seized power, this was universally recognised. A regime which nurtured Al Qaida, hosted Usama bin Laden for five years and was implicated in a series of international terrorist attacks is widely seen as having 'changed'. Change is not the same as containment. There is little evidence of substantive ideological change but in any case, the regime's pattern of violent repression at home has certainly not changed. This cannot be tackled if it is not acknowledged.

10. The above points can be summed up thus:

-- Both peace and democracy threaten the NCP and free and fair elections would inevitably lead to its downfall: it will therefore do its considerable best to prevent free polls.

-- The major contradiction in the CPA is that one signatory, the NCP, wants it to fail (in order not to lose the South), while the other signatory, the SPLM, wants the CPA to succeed (in order to have the option of independence).

The NCP: Why is it so important?

Sudan is often seen as a 'failed' or 'fragile' state and one problem with this is that the dominant political party, the NCP, is also often dismissed as weak and ineffectual. Nothing could be further from the truth. Sudan has an exceptionally well organised and ruthless government.

Two issues arise here. Firstly, since the CPA, the NCP no longer dominates the South, where the GOSS reigns. The CPA does allow the NCP an official role, including in security: this helps the NCP to try to stymie the CPA. It has eyes everywhere in the South.

Secondly, the country as a whole has, under the CPA, a Government of National Unity, which includes the SPLM. It is widely accepted that the SPLM's role is largely a token one. For instance, though it holds the Foreign Minister's position, the NCP conducts its own separate foreign policy, largely through veteran NIF stalwarts Ghazi Salah el Din Atabani (Western countries) and Mustafa Osman Ismail (Arab countries). Foreign governments know they have to talk to Ghazi or Mustafa Osman to reach the centre of power. The NCP is in charge and Sudanese usually take this for granted in Northern Sudan.

How the NIF seized power.

To understand why the NCP is not like any 'typical' African or Arab political party, or like any other of Sudan's many and varied parties, it is necessary to take a look at its nature. Clearly there is no room here to go into the complex history of a party that grew up in Sudan after the Second World War, inspired and assisted by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. However, we can note that its key characteristics are organisation, dedication, long-termism, secrecy, ruthlessness and, of course, an Islamist ideology, meaning an ideology that is both religious and political and claims a monopoly of both Islamic theology and the right to impose its version of Islam, by whatever means it deems necessary, including extreme violence. In more democratic times, activists from the MB (later NIF, now NCP) were known for turning up at centrist and left-wing demonstrations brandishing iron bars ('sikka') which they would readily use on unarmed fellow students.

The systematic use of violence makes war a political strategy

This surely makes the regime's unprovoked attacks on Darfur civilians from 1989 onwards, and especially from 2001-02, more understandable: they fit into a survivalist strategy of 'kill or be killed'. This policy involves attacking civilians, including in areas where there is no existing rebellion: the regime has consistently attacked people because they were 'the wrong type of Muslim' (Darfur, Nuba Mountains) or else 'infidels' (kuffar), as in the South and Nuba.

The NIF bides its time:

After years of repression, the late President Nimeiri allowed the NIF to operate again in 1977 and that's when it began preparing for power. Though the party was visible, most of its activities were covert. Many of its preparations for power thus became clear only with hindsight. Preparations included ensuring that leaders (almost entirely civilians) had military training: Ghazi Salah el Din, for example, is a medical doctor but can drive a tank. Activists did secret weapons training in Sudan's vast expanses (as have British Islamist activists in the Brecon Beacons, for instance).

Cadres were dispatched to the far ends of the country, either as sleepers or to work openly in middle-ranking civil service positions, including teaching and agricultural extension work. This gave them access to local politics nationwide and to learn whom their future enemies would be. Graduates were sent abroad, at party expense, for further studies in, among others, psychology and computer studies – both little known disciplines in Sudan; both invaluable for a theocratic party that intended to impose its will. Others were trained in friendly countries, especially Iran, where torture techniques and military expertise were on offer. Around a dozen years of such preparations reflect the long-termism that is seen as a prime characteristic of Islamist organisations. It also suggests that this is not a party that intends to give up power. Democracy is not an option.

The importance of continuity.

While Western civil servants and aid workers do their two- or three-year stints in or on a specific country or issue, Sudanese are living on a different time-scale. Political longevity characterises the leaders of the main political parties: the Umma Party's El Sadig el Mahdi was first Premier in the 1960s; the veteran Sudan Communist Party leader, Ibrahim Nugud, is in his eighties.

In the NCP, this combines with Islamist long-termism to ensure continuity and solidity. The regime's key leaders today were its key leaders in 1989, including the Second Vice-President, Ali Osman Mohamed Taha, and President Omer Hassan Ahmed el Beshir himself who, although not a key decision-maker, has fulfilled useful functions in taming the Armed Forces, giving the regime a 'more acceptable' military (rather than Islamist) hue and allowing the civilians who are the real decision-makers to hide behind him. His and Ali Osman's quarrels with Hassan el Turabi, for years the party's guiding star, are profound but many Sudanese think they will be overcome when the crunch comes. Though personal squabbles abound, like the Nazi Party at Wannensee, when the chips are down, the party sticks together for its collective survival. Turabi's ostensible sidelining in 1999 (a tactic previously used) allowed the party to survive when it was under extreme pressure from the US government after the NIF's involvement in international terrorism.

Terrorism and the NIF/NCP.

The NIF/NCP involvement in major terrorist attacks, including those on the World Trade Center (1993), President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt (1995) and the USS Cole (Yemen) are well documented. It is also suspected in the bombing of the US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 and it has tried at various times to destabilise all its nine neighbours. Western governments appear to believe that they have 'contained' the NCP and stopped it from indulging in terrorism abroad. Key architects of early NIF security policy are still in place, including Nafi'e Ali Nafi'e and Salah Abdullah Mohamed 'Gosh' (both now presidential advisors). At the very least, therefore, assumptions that the NCP's terrorist era is over would seem to require revisiting, with more external monitoring than appears to be happening. It would seem useful to attempt to bridge the gap between assumptions about the regime's violence at home and abroad. This is, after all, the same government.

The NCP and the CPA.

I have gone into some detail about the NCP because those interested in the CPA often focus mainly on the South. The NCP knows well how to exploit this. It controls the Khartoum government and has done so for 20 years. In other words, if it does not want the CPA to succeed, the CPA will fail. It was forced to the negotiating table from 2000 onwards and has been delaying the process ever since, buying itself another decade in power. These ten years allowed it to consolidate its hold on the economy, including oil, and indeed, to carry out mass slaughter in Darfur. In essence, the ceasefire in the South, which marked the first stage of the Machakos negotiations, allowed it to redeploy to the west and focus its military energies on training, arming and strategising the Janjaweed and People's Defence Force militia in Darfur. (All this is well documented, including in UN, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International reports).

The NCP now appears to be repeating this pattern in the South, arming militias which fought for it in the long war until the CPA and were supposedly integrated into the SPLA under the accord. The SPLM is now openly accusing Khartoum of arming such militia again and says it has evidence of weapon

supplies. One reason it is loathe to expose such evidence may be that some of the leaders of the 'integrated' militia are, by virtue of ranks conferred on them by Khartoum before the CPA, senior officers (including generals) in the SPLA. The forces of the most prominent former militia leader, Paulino Matiep Nhial, in October fought the very SPLA of which Gen. Paulino is Deputy Commander in Chief.

The clashes that have left over 2,000 civilians dead in the South in the past year are not due only to grazing or ethnic conflicts or to the weapons washing around the region. Some at least are clearly triggered by Khartoum, which has a distinct interest in not 'losing' the South. The assumption in much of the international community that the NCP signed the CPA in good faith needs reassessment. The eroding of the SPLM's pretence that all is well in the Unity Government is a sure sign that it does not believe that.

This was epitomised in the SPLM's hosting an October meeting of Northern parties, an unprecedented event. The NCP angrily refused to attend, consecrating the All Political Parties Conference as an opposition event. This suggests not only that the SPLM believes the NCP will not implement the 'laws protecting freedoms' enshrined in the CPA but that the referendum itself is under threat. The meeting agreed to boycott the national elections, due in April after two delays, if the NCP did not implement the freedom laws.

A CPA contradiction

This points to one of the essential contradictions in the CPA: the Agreement provides for democratisation, including free elections. However, no Sudanese spoken to has the slightest doubt that in a fair election, the NCP (and with it, Sudan's unpopular Islamist movement) would be thoroughly vanquished. In other words, the NCP cannot afford transparent polls and, as in any dictatorship and certainly one as organised as it is, it can use the powers of incumbency in various ways to ensure victory (See the Rift Valley Institute's 2009 election report, by Peter Woodward, Atta el Battahani and Justin Willis).

Sudanese hopes

The international community is not in a position to ensure that polls are free, although it could do much at least to monitor and, perhaps, publicise, irregularities. A weakness over the past five years has been the lack of foreign interest in Sudan's parties which claim democratic affiliation. Much could have been done to strengthen the internal democracy of these parties and help them to restore democracy, a long cherished ideal among Sudanese as I witnessed, for instance, in the popular uprising which overthrew President Nimeiri in 1985, when crowds of ordinary people marched through Khartoum joyfully shouting 'Westminster! Westminster!' Instead, the parties more or less collapsed under their own inertia, amply helped by the divide-to-rule tactics in which the NCP excels.

Sudanese fears

Many Sudanese fear that the international community will believe it can live with very flawed elections (perhaps with the claim that this is the only way to protect the CPA, which has become sacrosanct). An election victory would entrench the NCP even more deeply, giving it a spurious legitimacy. Abroad, such a victory would greatly bolster its successful campaign to rally the African Union, Arab League and other organisations of the 'Global South' (Third World) to discredit the ICC and present its indictment of President Omer el Beshir for war crimes and crimes against humanity as a 'Western-Zionist plot'. This does not look helpful to Western political, economic or security interests, let alone the Sudanese population. A young Southerner who labours on a Khartoum building site to put himself through a self-help school wrote to a friend in England this week: 'Sudan approach it is general election which will take place on coming few months, people are waiting in fear'.

References and further reading: Africa Confidential newsletter (passim); Parliamentary Brief; BBC Monitoring Global Security website.

