

**Unity in Diversity**

**Or**

***A Plague on Both Your Houses***

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For the

The Parliamentary Hearings on Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement  
(CPA)

Organised by the Associate Party Group (APG) on Sudan

The author is an Indonesian born Dutch national, currently based in London working as a journalist and historian, mainly as media consultant to the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in London and as Chief Executive of the SCSBI, specialising in the Sahara-Sahel region (particularly Sudan and Mauritania); after graduating from the University of Amsterdam and a Master's degree following post graduate research at Trinity College Dublin (TCD) worked as a journalist in Ireland, including covering the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland. Member amongst other of the Sudan Studies Society of the United Kingdom (SSSUK), the Sudan Archaeological Research Society (SARS) and the Royal African Society' African Studies Association of the UK (RAS/ASAUK). As the 'historian' he accompanied the Sudan APG on its field trip to Sudan in September 2007.

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**Remarks to qualify the Submission:**

- 1) The submission reflects the personal views, comments and observations of the author and don't reflect necessarily the position of the SCSBI.
- 2) The submission also reflects the situation in Sudan, and in particular that of the CPA by the end of October 2009, as observed from the UK, and as the author is a historian who does not do predictions or prophecies, he can only observe issues such as the elections scheduled for 2010 and the referendum on secession of southern Sudan scheduled for 2011 as they stand in October 2009 and by the time the Sudan APG intends to hold its hearings in January next year the situation in Sudan, and especially in relation to the CPA (elections, referendum etc) may be completely changed from what they were three months earlier, after all this Sudan.
- 3) The SCSBI is a recently formed independent, non (party) political or partisan think tank based in London by Sudanese and non Sudanese individuals with a remit to seek, covering the UK and Ireland, to find the middle ground in Sudan between the official position of National Congress party (NCP) and those who blame the NCP for all the evils of modern Sudan; the SCSBI prides itself to be a friend of Sudan, but any good friend is a critical and questioning friend; it seeks to promote the culture of Sudan and its peoples to assist them in reaching a common and inclusive identity that accepts that such a identity should recognise the diverse historical and cultural traditions and heritage of the people that are the citizens of the modern Republic of Sudan.

**Summary:**

The CPA is not perfect, but the 'only show in town'; if the CPA is allowed to fail, there will be no peace in Darfur and regional implications will be horrendous. Those muttering in and outside Sudan that 'war is preferable over a bad peace' are guilty of criminal war mongering. Instead all efforts should concentrate on assisting the Sudanese to make it work and develop it from its North-South context, including in finding a Sudanese identity as a unifying force that recognises the diversity of the Sudanese past and present.

## Introduction

The author's comments and observations are based on his experiences as journalist, working often in countries where there are, unfortunately more often than not violent, conflicts over (national) identities, involving issues of ethnicity, religion, and historical background, such as in Ireland, or in such modern countries of the Sahara/Sahel as Mauritania and Sudan, countries often also on the sharp end of the fault line between the Arab world and (Tropical) Africa and which are often accused of favouring their 'Arab' identity over its 'African' identity.

(Note: 'Tropical' Africa refers to that part of its continent south of the Tropic of Cancer, north of which Africa shares many geographical and cultural traits with the Mediterranean and the Near East. The term 'Black' is purely based on colour and with its implicit implications of race and culture not satisfactory. The term 'sub-Saharan' is a more neutral geographical term, but no good for the historians and archaeologists of the Middle Nile and the Sahara/Sahel belt because the African peoples and cultures they study would be by definition excluded as such for instance the Nubians of northern Sudan and southern Egypt or the Zaghawa of western Sudan, Chad and southern Libya, both up and beyond the Tropic of Cancer!)

The author arrived at his interest in the Middle Nile Valley region of the eastern Sahara/Sahel, and now forming the bulk of the modern Republic of Sudan, because of his own classical background in Ancient History and his interest in African History that became popular in Western universities in the 1960s and 70s; it is the logical outcome of combining these two interests. One finds references to this ancient land not only in the Holy Koran and Holy Bible (both testaments), but also in Homer, Herodotus and Plutarch to mention a few ancient authors; the 'blameless Aethiopians' are part of our own historical and cultural heritage.

Modern Sudan derives its name as the eastern or Nilotic part of the historical region that Arabic Mediaeval geographers called the *Bilad al Sudan* or the 'land of the black peoples', which began, culturally somewhere in the southern Sahara around the Tropic of Cancer, stretching southwards through the Sahel and beyond into the dry and wet savannah zones.

The Middle Nile region of modern Sudan is the home of Tropical Africa's oldest civilisation, Kush, rivalling Pharaohnic Egypt, predating the Axum civilisation straddling the border of neighbouring modern Eritrea and Ethiopia, and Ghana in the western Sahel of southeast modern Mauritania. Already in Ancient times the Pharaohnic Egyptians, Greeks and Romans acknowledged that the peoples that lived south of the First Cataract in the Nile Valley at Aswan, just north of the Tropic of Cancer, were different, culturally and otherwise, from those to the north; while the Egyptians referred to this area as Kush, the Greeks and Romans called it *Aethopia* or 'land of the people with burnt faces' before it became known in Mediaeval times as Nubia. However, the historical map of Sudan is changing as our knowledge based on archaeology, anthropology etc increases as more research becomes available and begins to stretch out from the riverine core to the east, south and west. This may result as Dr David Edwards has suggested (*The Nubian Past: An archaeology of the Sudan*. London-New York 2004) in blurring the modern distinctions of 'North' and 'South' in modern Sudan as we may discover a past in which all of modern Sudan was the 'South'

The archaeologists and historians of Kush and Nubia have come to recognise the Middle Nile Valley from the First Cataract at Aswan to beyond the confluence of the Blue and White Niles, probably as far south as the *Sudd* in southern Sudan as an area sharing a common historical cultural identity from the time of prehistoric Neolithic cultures, A Group, the kingdoms of Kush (first Kerma and later Napata/Meroe), to the Iron Age X Group, the Christian Nubian kingdoms of Makuria and Alwa, and its Funj Muslim successor state of the *Sultana al Zurqa*, or 'Black Sultanate,' based at Sennar on the Blue Nile until its conquest by the Turco-Egyptian forces of Mohamed Ali Pasha in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and which led eventually to the creation of the Anglo-Egyptian condominium to which were added areas to the west, east and south becoming independent within its current borders in 1956.

Like with so many other borders on the political map of modern Africa they were drawn up at the Berlin conference that carved up Africa between the competing and aggressive imperialist powers in Europe and the weakening Ottoman empire, initiating the scramble of Africa in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century without any consideration for the historical, political and cultural heritage and traditions of the peoples affected who found themselves by the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> into the 20<sup>th</sup> century as subjects of far away colonial masters.

These only adjusted the Berlin maps to take cognizance of topographical features such as rivers and mountain ranges rather than again historical, cultural and ethnic considerations. Peoples and cultures with long standing historical links were split up and others with no links or even worse with historical animosities were thrown together and when independence came from on the second half of the 1950s they were expected to be the citizens of new 'nations' and behave accordingly like modern nation states.

This was enshrined in the legal principle of *uti posseditis juri* and endorsed by the UN and the Organisation of African Unity, the predecessor of the African Union (AU), also as the argument against secessionist movement in the new African states and attempts to partition them in an often failed attempt to prevent civil and regional wars. It often resulted in one dominant cultural tradition in the new nation becoming political dominant, such as Islam and Arabic language and culture in modern Sudan.

This was not something perverse as some commentators and analysts, especially linked to southern secessionist movements, have tried to argue, and not something uniquely for modern Sudan, but it can be found among many modern independence movements and new independent nations such as for instance in Ireland, the second source of the author's experiences and inspiration.

When the greater part of island of Ireland (26 counties) seceded in 1921 from the United Kingdom, which in turn partitioned off six Irish Northeastern counties, becoming first the independent Irish Free State, which continued to challenge the British sovereignty over those six Ulster counties, the new state declared itself to be 'Gaelic', ie claiming a return to the Celtic roots of Ireland, and in its new Constitution gave a special status to the Roman Catholic Church, resulting that those Irish people who did not consider themselves as 'Gaelic' and were for instance Protestant and of English or Scottish descent, felt excluded.

The flipside was that in Northern Ireland political and other power became vested in the small majority who considered themselves British and were Protestant at the expense of the substantial minority who considered themselves Irish and were Catholic. The irony was that historically Irish nationalism and republicanism were rooted in 18<sup>th</sup> century Irish Protestant society of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the 'Irish Nation' equated 'Protestant', ie the Anglican and mainly of English descent minority section of the Irish people, while the Protestant Dissenter minority, mainly Presbyterian and of Scottish descent, and the Catholic majority, mainly of Celtic ('Gaelic'), were excluded,

However, under the influence of the Enlightenment and the American and French revolutions Irish nationalism and republicanism proclaimed to represent all Irish people of the above backgrounds. But a 100 years later the term the 'Irish Nation' became to mean the Catholic majority, and Irish nationalism and republicanism came to reflect their aspirations mainly, (the Protestant minority became Unionist and changed its identity to 'British'), and made so its imprint on the newly independent Irish State, not unlike the newly independent Sudan reflected the aspirations of the Moslem and Arabic majority.

The question of how to arrive at new inclusive new post independence-colonial identity also vexed the founding fathers of the Republic of Indonesia Soekarno and Hatta who proclaimed independence on 17 August 1945; the author's own mother country and his last but not least source of experience and inspiration.

Well before this date the independence movement was split between those who wanted an independent Indonesia to be Islamic to reflect its Moslem majority or those nationalists who fervently believed that the future state should be secular and reflect all traditions and heritage, including of non Muslim minorities of Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and of traditional believers. Soekarno and Hatta won the argument and constructed a republican ideology that was based on the *Pancasila* or five principles: Belief in the One Supreme God, guaranteeing equality between the Muslim majority and non Muslim minorities; Just and Civilised Humanity; Unity of Indonesia; Democracy guided by Unanimity, and Social Justice for all the people of Indonesia. The new republic's symbolism also drew heavily on the iconography of the pre Muslim Java based Hindu kingdoms with the national emblem of the *Garuda*, carrying the slogan *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* or 'Unity in Diversity', which the late Dr John Garang said was his leading principle too.

Even during the war of independence against Dutch during 1945-49 the Communists on the Left and the Islamists, some of whom until this day seek to establish by violent means an Islamist state, tried to subvert the Indonesia's republican ethos, with Indonesia's robust response to these threats drawing sharp criticism from the Left and the Right in the West; the Christian Right even trying to create the narrative and imagery of Christians, and in particular 'Black' Christians of eastern Indonesia, being suppressed by the 'Brown' Moslems of western Indonesia, reflecting a similar narrative and imagery applied to northern and southern Sudan.

No matter what one may think of the first 60 years of independent Indonesia, there can be no doubt that since the reform movement of 1998 Indonesia today is now regarded as one of the most free and democratic Southeast Asian countries, showing that there is no contradiction between being the largest Moslem country and being the third largest democracy, but unfortunately many of the Left and the (Christian) Right in the West prefer to hang on to the past for their own political reasons. Similarly the same elements seem to be hell bound to damn the NCP no matter what has been changed in Sudan since 2001, particular since the CPA was signed in 2005 in Navaisha, Kenya, with the mainly southern Sudanese Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), and seem to be prepared to see the CPA fail in favour of a not so hidden agenda of 'regime change' in Khartoum and partition of Sudan by steering elements within the SPLM/A in that direction.

### **The Current Situation**

The CPA is often criticised for being not 'comprehensive', as it was only a peace agreement between North and South, in particular the NCP and the SPLM/A, excluding not only other northern and southern (opposition) parties, but also other regions of Sudan, particular the West (Darfur) and the East, which claim to suffer from marginalisation compared with the Nile Valley in the centre. The CPA was meant to end modern Africa's longest civil war, which had started even before independence in 1956 in south Sudan, and which had spread to the East and tentatively to Darfur during the second phase of the civil war that started in 1983; one reason for the eruption of a full scale insurgency in Darfur in 2003 was the fatal message of the peace negotiations with the SPLM/A that to achieve concessions from the centre was to fight one's way to the conference table with guns blazing and with guns not only under the table but on the table as well! Equally fatal is the notion that seems to be increasingly popularised in certain circles that the CPA is not even a peace agreement, but merely a ceasefire, before another North-South war is likely to happen. Even more disturbingly is the view prevalent under hawkish SPLM/A elements who are saying that "war is preferable to a 'bad peace'," which seems sadly to be supported by some non Sudanese 'Sudan Specialists' supporting the SPLM/A at the last SSSUK annual symposium in October, arguing that the new war "would only" be fought along the contested north-south demarcation line, as if war had solved anything in the last 50 years.

Those in the SPLM/A and their non Sudanese foreign supporters who appear glibly to subscribe to this argument could do worse than to remember the acerbic words of the former deputy leader of the Northern Ireland constitutional nationalist Social Democratic & Labour Party (SDLP), Seamus Mallon: “The Good Friday Agreement (of 1998) is ‘Sunningdale’ (the failed peace agreement of 1973) for slow learners,” arguing that much of what was agreed in 1998 had been agreed in 1973 and much of the subsequent loss of life and destruction would not have happened if militant republicans and unionists had accepted ‘Sunningdale and warning all parties not to spoil this second chance for peace, stressing that one made peace with one’s enemies and not one’s friends and therefore willingness for meaningful compromise by all was called for.

In the same vein ‘Navaisha’ (CPA of 2005) is ‘Addis Ababa’ (1972 peace agreement) for ‘slow learners’ in Sudan. The ‘Good Friday Agreement’ also required constitutional nationalists and militant republicans as well as constitutional unionists and militant loyalists to compromise their respective principles of a united Irish Republic today and an United Kingdom forever and to seek to work for these political ideals by constitutional, ie non violent means only; it required nationalists/republicans and unionists to share power in Northern Ireland, to work with the Irish Republic and for the Irish Republic with the UK; a cultural collateral aspect of these political aspects is that there should be parity between the ‘Green’, or ‘Irish’ and ‘Catholic’ tradition and the ‘Orange’ or ‘British’ and ‘Protestant’ tradition in both parts of Ireland, north and south, allowing for a more inclusive Irish identity.

A few more aspects of the Irish peace process to note relevant to the Sudanese peace process are: A) An amnesty for all those for all those convicted, charged and sought for crimes as members of republican and loyalist paramilitary (militia) organisations who signed up to the peace accord, allowed to decommission their own arms; no international tribunal! B) A compromise was achieved between the British side who sought to find a domestic solution and the Irish side, who sought to find an international endorsed solution; in particular the republican paramilitaries relied heavily on foreign support in the US and elsewhere.

The situation in Northern Ireland is still not perfect, but the main paramilitary groups on both sides understood that their communities were tired of war and that any real progress could only be made through constitutional, political means only, and this is still so, despite the presence of small but dangerous dissident armed groups who try to wreck the ongoing peace process.

The SPLM/A seems, like so many other African opposition groups, still rely on their foreign supporters and the near mythical 'International Community' rather than engage directly at home to find a solution. That relationship is increasing becoming problematic as African domestic opposition groups increase their demands, harden their stand, refuse to engage domestically in the mistaken expectation that the 'International Community' will force, if necessary by armed intervention, their government to give in and cede power etc, often encouraged by foreign based so-called 'advocacy' NGOs with their friendly links to lazy Western media.

This can be seen clearly in Darfur and the relationship between the 'Save Darfur' and similar campaigns with Darfur rebel groups, and the SPLM/A seems often to revert to similar positions. Equally the SPLM/A appears not to have been able, first to separate its political wing from its military wing, with the latter becoming subordinate to the political wing, which in turn becomes a totally civilian organisation, shedding its default line as 'rebels' and taking its responsibility within the state following the example of the Irish republican movement. The SPLM/A treats the Government of South Sudan as its personal fiefdom, marginalising those who are not part of the ethnic groups that form the core of the movement, while at national Sudanese level the SPLM/A appears to prefer to behave like an opposition/rebel group rather than act statesman like as partners in the central power sharing Government of National Unity.

The SPLM/A and other Sudanese (regional) opposition groups with their foreign supporters should also stop reduce all arguments about justice and equality in the prism of centre versus periphery. Historically speaking the Middle Nile Valley has been the cultural, economic and political centre of the country that became the modern Republic of Sudan. Today it is Khartoum and the Nile valley where most of its population lives, and while it is the home of a small affluent elite, this majority is in need of and entitled to further development. Again this situation is not uniquely Sudanese, but applies to Indonesia with the capital Jakarta and the island of Java, or even the UK with London and Southeast England.

### **Conclusion:**

History has created modern Sudan since the ancient times of Kush to the imperialist conquest of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is up to all the citizens of the modern Republic to recognise this historical fact and turn it in positive assets that unites the people rather than divides them.

It requires those in northern Sudan with exclusive Islamist and Arabist aspirations to recognise that Sudan has a non Islamic and Arabic past as well as having non Arabic and Moslem citizens today. It requires the SPLM/A to take ownership, metaphorically, of the total Sudan past and to relinquish its literally ownership of the GoSS and share it; similar arguments apply to all Sudanese opposition groups.

Their foreign based supporters should stop 'advocating' the partition of Sudan as a means to 'punish Khartoum' for the past, as the implications of the CPA failing are too horrendous to consider, not only for all the people of Sudan, but for the wider regions of the Sahara/Sahel, the Horn, the Rift and Great Lakes.