

**Evidence to the Parliamentary Hearing on Sudanese Peace
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Sudanese - UK Parliamentary Relations

On the 27th October 09, the House of Lords witnessed an historic occasion; the launch of a group which openly aims at promoting good relations with Arab League members. The step came very late; but it is welcome. “Friends of Israel” groups in the main political parties and in the Houses of Parliament have a long and well-documented history. The chance to air a “second opinion” is in line with the tenets of British democracy.

There was a sigh of relief when the report of the Sudan All Party Parliamentary Group was published two years ago. The British sense of fairness and objective assessment was evident. The report recommended engaging Sudan. It highlighted positive as well as negative political features. It was in many ways a trailblazing precursor of the USA’s new Sudan Policy. This did not come as a surprise to students and observers of British-Sudanese relations.

The Sudanese did not need the sacrifice of a million martyrs (like the Algerians) in order to achieve independence. That happened through constitutional means for which the British trained the Sudanese, beginning with the Legislative Assembly of 1948. A clerk was even seconded to be trained at Westminster in the proper way to conduct and run parliamentary matters. When the colonial administration came to an end in December 1955 – January 1956, the Sudanese threw a farewell tea party at the Palace for the British with whom they fought during the Second World War against Nazism and Fascism.

Technically, the Sudan was not a “colony”; its affairs were conducted by the Foreign Office (because of its condominium status as an Anglo-Egyptian territory).

Against this background, a legitimate riddle should be addressed. Why is there covert and overt anti Northern Sudanese prejudice? When the BBC correspondents report from Khartoum, they resent the new buildings and the “hegemony of Khartoum over the margins”. The fact that London is different from Newcastle is not a factor for them. The Conservative Party report which foresaw the increasing irrelevance of cities like Manchester and Liverpool is not mentioned. Nor is the fact that the phenomenon is international and that Khartoum is a relatively young city. The founding families have still got relatives in all provinces.

American melting-pot terminology is quite handy. The most important Defence of Northerners is the fact that the three-pronged capital city is a microcosm of Sudan. It spearheaded modernisation. Trade Unions, political parties, sport and philanthropical societies and clubs, women’s movement – all began in the capital on a **National** not tribal basis. Those who moved to the capital from the provinces made a National contribution. This should be compared to nascent tribally based political movements (embraced by some in the West) like the Justice and Equality Movement which is Zaghawa oriented to the extent that it actually **fought** in Chad last year to save the Zaghawa led regime then crossed the border to attack the Sudanese capital in May. Another example is the Fur dominated Sudan Liberation Movement (which began life as Darfur Liberation Movement). Tribally incited conflicts in the Southern Sudan are so marked that their death toll exceeded that of Darfur according to UN sources. While Tribal affiliations have

not vanished in the North and the capital – they are definitely an anachronism. Population movement and intermarriage have consigned tribal prejudice to the realm of jokes and anecdotes - no more.

The **detrribalised** capital is more progressive and modern than its “tribal” adversaries. In this sense the conflicts in Sudan are not between the **margins** and the **centre** but between **modernisation** and **pre-modern** socio-political structures. The West seems to prefer and favour the latter.

Yesterday President Barak Obama, has emulated George W. Bush in renewing Bush’s sanctions on Sudan. Happily, he did not declare the “smart sanctions” advocated by professional enemies of stability in Sudan, like targeting only areas in which Arabic speaking Muslims are a majority. The activists had even called for attacking Sudan militarily!

The sanctions, which are adhered to by British financial institutions and banks too, are designed ostensibly to encourage Sudan to fully implement the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. But the CPA has almost been completed: The interim constitution has been passed, the Government of Southern Sudan has been formed. A National Unity Government is now in power, preparations for elections and the referendum are under way.

There are hitches and warts; but they are the outcome of “schoolboy politics” by parties which need basic capacity building and training in the ABC of governance. The way the census results have been disputed is a good example of this. The way the referendum negotiations are conducted is another.

The second pretext for renewing the sanctions is Darfur; but the government has signed the Darfur Peace Agreement in 06 while the rebels refused. Their most recalcitrant elements refuse to negotiate until this day and none is called by the “T” word. They are welcomed in Western capitals where several radio and internet centres have been established for them (e.g. in France and Holland).

The West was quite wise when in the words of John Kerry, it decided to give diplomacy a chance, recognise that the International Criminal Court has complicated matters; but move on.

Unfairly, the Sudan is never given credit for the fact it has not erected a barbed wired barrier like the one between South Africa and Mozambique, has never ordered mass exodus at a week’s notice like the one which Nigeria and Ghana went through in the 1970’s against each other’s immigrants, has never tried to fence a well-guarded boundary like the one between the USA and Mexico, has never had a political wall like the one in Northern Ireland (still intact even after peace) or like the one in Baghdad between Sunni and Shiite quarters – or lastly like the infamous Israeli land-grabbing wall, or the Berlin wall which fell apart twenty years ago! The blinkered enemies of Sudan see only what they like to see. That is why they fail – the way their machinations have led to the coherence of the home front and the disintegration of their own plans.

Even Nicholas Kristof, has acknowledged that “Save Darfur Coalition” is on its last legs.

It was, as the Jerusalem Post has hinted an extension of AIPAC in the USA. Are there attempts to disinter it under another name and “new management” in the UK?

Will British celebrities be policy makers and philosophers? Joanna Lumley is currently in Sudan for a serious and worthwhile documentary; but contacts might be under way to recruit others (reality TV stars!) for an anti-Sudanese campaign using the word “crisis”, overlooking the fact that General Martin Luther Agwai has testified that the conflict is virtually over in Darfur.

Let us hope that the historic launch on 27 October 09 of a group which is not inimical to the Arab League will benefit Sudanese-British relations, fortify the objective attitude of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Sudan, and take the wind off the sails of any attempt to transplant “Save Darfur” spin tactics to the UK.

There is a solid bedrock for Sudanese-British friendship, based on mutual interests and respect, the Sudanese are keen to build on it and cement it.

Khalid Almubarak

Sudanese Playwright and Columnist

Disclaimer: This is a personal not official point of view.