Rwandan Takes 'Shape' in Africa

The West Sites Back as Another

Monday, May 9, 2005
THE DAILY TELEGRAPH
Khartoum talks peace, but means domination

In a continent racked by civil war, Sudan stands out. Since independence in 1956, Africa's largest country has suffered from two prolonged bouts of fighting. The first ended in 1972 with the promise of autonomy for the south, whose peoples are mainly Christian and followers of traditional African faiths. The second began in 1983, after the government in the largely Muslim north had tried to impose sharia law on the whole country. It is not surprising, therefore, that the peace deal signed in Kenya last week by the Khartoum government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLA) should have been greeted with a sigh of relief. It seems to herald the end of Africa's longest conflict, which in the past 21 years is estimated to have caused the deaths of some two million people, many of them from famine and disease, and displaced a further four million.

Sadly, there are serious doubts as to whether the new agreement will hold. They centre on the autocratic nature of the two partners, John Garang, the SPLA leader in the south, and the National Congress government in the north. Mr Garang's cause, the liberation of an oppressed minority, enjoys general support in the south, but his modus operandi has gained him enemies both within his own Dinka tribe and among the Nuer and others. He may well have difficulty in selling Wednesday's agreement on power-sharing and the status of three disputed areas to the people he claims to represent.

The same applies in spades to the Islamist Khartoum government, whose origins lie in the military ousting of a democratically elected government in 1989 and whose practice since has been ruthlessly to bar other parties from office. That sense of alienation can be seen most clearly in the western region of Darfur, as Patrick Smith demonstrates on the facing page. But it is also apparent among the armed Beja rebels in the east, and among political parties competing peacefully with the National Congress for power. President Omar Hassan Ahmad el-Bashir heads an exclusive, ideologically driven government determined not only to dominate Sudan, but also to export its extreme brand of Islam to other parts of Africa. The peace deal provides for six years of National Congress/SPLA rule, after which the south will decide by referendum whether to secede. However, it is difficult to imagine Khartoum, whose armed forces are among the biggest in Africa, agreeing to forgo much of its revenue from oil if the southern option is independence.

The four sets of agreements between Khartoum and the SPLA – an earlier one this year covered a national army and the sharing of oil revenues – are due to foreign, especially American, pressure rather than trust between the negotiating partners. That pressure will have to be maintained if the deals are to stand a chance of implementation. At the same time, outside powers must not allow the diplomatic breakthrough in Kenya to excuse in Darfur what the United Nations has called the greatest humanitarian crisis in the world. President el-Bashir's government talks peace, but by its actions continues to demonstrate its rabid intolerance of Sudan's wide ethnic, religious and political diversity.
British-US rift on how to deal with Sudan ‘cleansing’

BY ADRIAN BLOOMFIELD
IN NAIROBI

BRITAIN has said it will not support calls for military intervention in Sudan despite warnings that a government campaign of ethnic cleansing against black Muslims in Darfur could cause 350,000 deaths in the next few months.

Alan Goult, Tony Blair’s special envoy to Sudan, said he also opposed sanctions against Khartoum.

The comments are likely to widen a foreign policy rift between Britain and America, the two most important western players in Sudan.

United States officials are convinced that sanctions are the only way of exerting meaningful pressure on Khartoum to avert a catastrophe that is already being compared with the genocide in Rwanda 10 years ago.

But Mr Goult does not agree. “In the long term, threats of sanctions don’t seem likely to produce immediate action and immediate action is what we need,” he said.

“The more time we spend dithering, the more people will die.” The West has tried to ignore Darfur’s war, described by the United Nations as the world’s worst humanitarian crisis, since it began a year ago.

It is now too late to stop the ethnic cleansing. Darfur, an area the size of France, is largely empty. Arab militia men on horses and camels, armed and funded by kin men in Khartoum, have ridden across Darfur, burning villages, raping women and executing men of fighting age.

About 30,000 people have been killed. More than a million black Muslim civilians accused by Khartoum of supporting rebels fighting its political and economic marginalisation of Darfur have fled.

Most of them languish in camps in Darfur’s desert and Khartoum has done its best to ensure aid organisations cannot get there to feed them.

With seasonal rains expected any day, their plight can only worsen.

The only roads in Darfur and neighbouring Chad, to where at least 200,000 refugees have fled, cross dry river beds which fill up with water when the rain begins. Aid convoys will not be able to reach the overcrowded camps, where fostering disease will be worsened by the rain, for at least two months.

Last week, the International Crisis Group, a respected think tank, called on the UN Security Council to consider authorising the use of force to disarm the militias as the only way to ensure the delivery of emergency food and medicine.

Mr Goult insists that military intervention would be a drastic and ineffective response to the crisis.

“It would be very expensive, fraught with difficulties and hard to set up in a hurry,” he said.

Britain has long preferred a policy of “quiet diplomacy” with Khartoum.

British diplomats say their patience, as much as American bullying, led to a peace deal signed last week that could end a separate war, waged intermittently for half a century, between the government and non-Muslim rebels in the south.