Transcript

The Conclusion of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement: US Perspectives and Policy Goals in Sudan

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Assistant Secretary Johnnie Carson:

I’d like to thank Alex Vines and Chatham House for inviting me to speak today. It’s an honour to be here. My colleagues and I are avid readers of your Chatham House reports and policy papers, and we greatly appreciate the opportunity to participate in your many enriching seminars and conferences. You play a vital role in shaping foreign policy decision making not only here in London, but in Washington and other capitals around the world. Chatham House is important to London and Great Britain, it is also important to Washington and the State Department. So it is a pleasure to be here.

I would also like to take note of some dear, old friends here. Sean McCormick from the National Security staff of the Clinton administration, good to see you Sean. I’d also like to take the opportunity to welcome the Ambassadors of Uganda, Zimbabwe and other countries here and the Representative of Southern Sudan. I also want to welcome a person in the audience who knows as much as anyone about Sudan, and that is the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Special Representative on Sudan. That gives you some validation as to whether what I’m about to say merits any worth or criticism.

Before we open to questions and discussion, I’d like to make some brief remarks on Sudan. This past January we witnessed an historic event that demonstrated the ability of the Sudanese people, working together with the representatives from Africa and the rest of the international community, to overcome enormous obstacles and set the country on a path towards peace and renewal. For most of the previous year, many analysts warned the referendum was at high risk of delay, would be mired in controversy, and could lead to violence. Little, if any, preparation for the referendum was underway; the Southern Sudan Referendum Commission was not functioning; key provisions of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement—the CPA—were unimplemented; and many observers doubted northern leaders would allow the referendum to proceed without challenges or accept its results without discrediting them.

The analysis was sound at the time, even if discouraging. In some ways, it helped spur our government, our African partners, and the international community into action and brought an essential spotlight on the players and issues at stake. A delay in the referendum would have seriously jeopardized the entire CPA and potentially have condemned Sudan to more conflict and instability. Furthermore, a referendum that lacked credibility and international recognition would have greatly eroded the willingness of all parties to abide by the terms of the CPA.
Contrary to initial expectations, the referendum was a remarkable achievement. The governments in Northern and Southern Sudan—in addition to the African Union, United Nations, and many NGOs on the ground—deserve enormous credit for its success. They proved that concerted, determined, and persistent action over an agreed upon timetable can change the direction of history in the face of many obstacles and much pessimism.

We must draw on this positive example as we look ahead. Many of the challenges that threatened the referendum process are still there, and other obstacles are looming. A little over four months remain before Southern Sudan is scheduled to gain its independence, and then we will embark on a process that, ideally, will result in a viable, self-sustaining and just nation but which realistically may take decades. Concurrently, the Northern government and all the parties and factions of Darfur, including the rebel groups, will need to find a resolution to the conflict and instability in that region. To ensure progress toward a more durable peace, it may be necessary to sustain, if not increase, the kind of effort and international cooperation that has characterized our collective efforts on the CPA and the referendum.

I believe the most urgent task is the prompt and full implementation of the remaining provisions of the CPA, particularly those which we know to be the most contentious. We must build on the momentum and good will generated by the successful referendum to push the parties to make critical compromises on difficult issues. A number of the issues are closely linked to near-term security: the status of Abyei; the popular consultations in Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan States; and citizenship. As this audience knows, there is a large cluster of other issues related to the economic welfare and viability of the two states that must also be resolved, which I will mention later.

The status of Abyei is a complex issue involving migratory rights, control of oil resources, and demarcation of the border. Agreement was reached on Abyei in Naivasha and, the decision of the Abyei Boundary Commission was meant to be final and binding. The North’s refusal to accept the decision, however, led to arbitration that severely delayed implementation of the Abyei protocols as stipulated in the CPA. A referendum on Abyei’s status was mandated to take place last January in parallel with the north-south referendum, but obviously didn’t occur. Tensions there are strained, and several incidents of violence have occurred over the past two months and just last week. With Southern independence just around the corner, further procrastination could exacerbate an already volatile situation.
A final agreement on Abyei is unlikely to satisfy all parties completely. Nonetheless, it has the potential to gain the confidence of local populations, particularly the Ngok Dinka and other residents of the area, if it takes their practical concerns into sufficient consideration and respects the original spirit of the related CPA protocols that were agreed up on in Naivasha. The misseriyya and other nomadic groups need to be assured of continued grazing and migratory access to Abyei, and all parties need to be assured that there will be a mechanism for airing and resolving the inevitable grievances as they arise in the future. A robust conflict prevention capacity will need to be in place for at least several years until the new arrangement and revised boundaries are in place.

Popular consultations in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States, which border on South Sudan, were also supposed to have taken place before now. Continued procrastination of this CPA provision likewise poses a threat to security in the transition to southern independence. Unlike Abyei, these states do not have the option of joining the South. The governments in both states, along with the national government, need to reach an accommodation with the southern populations and remnants of the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement—the SPLM—within their borders. The war displaced much of the local population and sowed deep animosity between ethnic groups. Observers have raised warnings about the high risks of renewed conflict, especially since many people in both states fought with the SPLA and have retained their weapons and loyalty to the SPLM.

We would like to see the popular consultations proceed rapidly but in a credible fashion to ensure all parties are allowed to participate in the state government and are discouraged from taking up arms again. As with Abyei, aggressive conflict prevention mechanisms are essential to ensure localized disputes and grievances do not escalate into larger conflicts. Both the National Congress Party and SPLM have an enormous stake in having their members, constituents, and militant proxies work through their differences peacefully and not take actions that will undermine the progress that has been achieved thus far on the CPA.

Controversy over the status of as many as two million southerners in the North and smaller but significant numbers of northerners in the south is another major potential flashpoint that could be greatly diminished if both governments reached agreement on citizenship rights. We encourage the North and South to seek ways that guarantee the rights of work, property, residency, and movement for these civilians. Actions that might cause people suddenly to become aliens in places where they have established themselves
and raised their families will not only be disruptive, but could destroy the mutual trust necessary to accommodate the sovereign needs of each party. Failure to recognize these rights could even trigger the kind of violence that we have witnessed in other situations where nations have split—violence that we hope the Sudanese will wisely avoid. With sound judgment on both sides, this can be done.

Beyond reaching agreement on citizenship and resolving the territorial status of Abyei and final arrangement for Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan States, both the North and South face a long backlog of other more technical and economic issues which they have begun to address jointly and with the international community. Both governments seem to recognize that, for the near-term, they will remain ‘joined at the hip’ and that their ability to realize their respective national objectives and avoid future conflict will depend on the good will and good faith of their CPA partner. I hope the time for brinksmanship is over, but I also know each side will try to negotiate these final issues with determination and toughness. The international community is standing by with the appropriate technical support to help them through this difficult phase.

Foremost among the economic issues is wealth sharing and management of Sudan’s hydrocarbon resources. As much as the South would like to assert its economic independence, it will also need to recognize the interdependence of the oil sector. While substantial reserves lie in the South, irreplaceable expertise and critical infrastructure, particularly the export pipeline, are in the North. Several of the oil fields straddle the border, and, as is the case with other cross-border fields such as the ‘neutral zone’ between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, joint development could make the most economic sense, especially in the near term. Though the specific terms will need to be renegotiated, continued revenue sharing, a pipeline rental arrangement, and joint management of the oil sector would provide a major economic stake for both governments in each other’s overall stability. Grandiose plans for an alternative pipeline and export route, which would cost billions of dollars and take many years to execute, should only be considered if they make commercial sense. For the moment, the economic case for moving ahead on such projects does not exist.

Other issues to be resolved include the allocation of Sudan’s other assets, such as its hard currency reserves and embassies abroad, the disposition of its debts, and the manner in which the South might transition to its own currency. Wherever possible, the North and South should be looking to sustain and deepen their ties rather than preparing for an abrupt separation.
The lessons from world history are clear. No matter how bitter their conflict may have been, former adversaries who manage to come closer together out of mutual self-interest end up far better off than those who part ways. On one hand, we have positive examples such as France and Germany, and South Africa. On the other, we have examples such as India and Pakistan, and Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Northern and Southern Sudan need each other as friendly, stable, and economically strong neighbours. The trend in Africa is moving gradually toward greater political and economic integration, and in that sense, the North and South should strive to maintain as many links as possible and to encourage free trade and economic cooperation across their borders.

Achieving final CPA implementation and laying the ground work for Southern independence are no doubt tough tasks, but, as I suggested earlier, they are only the beginning of a much longer process for both sides. With independence comes enormous responsibility. Beyond the challenges of separating from the North, the South faces a series of especially hard internal challenges.

The vestiges of militia groups and proliferation of weapons pose an ongoing security threat in the absence of professional and appropriately sized, equipped, and configured military and other security institutions. Southern Sudan must make substantially more progress on security sector reform, demobilization of former fighters, and their social and economic reintegration over the next year. The United States and Southern Sudan’s other international partners are actively supporting these efforts.

Ethnic and political rivalries, war-related grievances, population displacement, and tensions between pastorialist and non-pastorialist peoples are another source of potential instability. Southern Sudan’s local and state governments have little capacity to mediate communal tensions to pre-empt violence or provide an outlet for people to voice their grievances peacefully. Politicians would be ill-advised to exploit these tensions just to undercut their rivals and increase their power. All too often this has had disastrous national consequences in other African countries.

Without question, the Republic of South Sudan will be one of the most disadvantaged states to join the international community over the past century. Its institutional foundations are weak to non-existent. Much of the area has virtually no transportation infrastructure, a weak educational system, no health services, and virtually no judicial system. Literacy, life expectancy, and other social indicators are among the lowest in the world. There is almost
no industry or basic economic infrastructure, and, outside of Juba, there are few Southern Sudanese with sufficient educational and skill levels to build them.

The challenge will be to build a nation nearly from scratch. I’m not sure any of us really knows how to go about this successfully, effectively, and under the harsh circumstances I’ve described. Ideally, the Republic of South Sudan will establish a coherent and realistic development plan that draws on the lessons and expertise of other countries that have undergone nation-building in the face of similar challenges.

Concurrently, we hope the Southern Sudanese people will build a local capacity so that, over the long term, they will gradually become less dependent on outsiders and the donor community and more self-reliant and self-sustaining. Southern Sudan’s international partners should provide their best technical expertise and appropriate resources, but I would encourage everyone to insist upon thoughtful coordination and avoidance of the kinds of mistakes made in Africa over the past 60 years.

Transparent and democratic processes should be the political standards of the Southern Sudanese people so that they can hold their government officials accountable for their decisions. We believe that citizens need to have adequate input into decision-making, in setting of priorities, and in the distribution of services. And, very importantly, expectations must be realistic and achievable. Progress will be slow, and most people may not see major improvement in their lives during the initial years of independence. But if Southern leaders hold themselves to the highest standards of conduct and devotion to their country, they stand a better chance of maintaining the trust of their people through potentially disappointing and difficult times. Given the many challenges and ongoing threats to its security, South Sudan must eschew authoritarianism, corruption, and a winner-take-all approach to politics. We also hope each citizen will be treated with dignity, that basic human rights will be respected, and resources will be allocated justly.

In the North, there is a different but no less daunting set of challenges. We have told the government in Khartoum that we are as committed to helping it work through these challenges as we are in the South. Khartoum took an enormous risk in signing the CPA, fulfilling its commitment to hold the referendum, and in readily accepting its outcome. The United States has presented the Sudanese government with a road-map towards normalized relations, including an eventual removal from the state-sponsor-of-terrorism list. Fully normalized relations, however, are contingent upon achieving a non-
military resolution to the ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis in Darfur. The government has the ability to improve its international standing through greater cooperation in dealing with this issue. Darfur rebels bear responsibility for this conflict as well, and we will do our part to pressure them to reach a compromise and to dissuade the Southern Sudanese government from supporting them militarily. We also believe Darfur is and should remain an integral part of Sudan.

Similarly, the Sudanese government should seek ways to establish greater mutual trust with the United Nations and international NGOs so that they can participate constructively in a solution for Darfur. One useful step would be to devise a means that would allow them regular, unhindered access to affected populations. As they did in ending the war with the South, the Government of Sudan probably will have to take some risks to demonstrate to its adversaries and sceptics that it is serious about peacefully resolving the situation in the Darfur region. A sustainable peace will depend on the government building more trust with the people of Darfur.

Despite its oil wealth and the economic boom observed in Khartoum over the past decade, living conditions in much of northern Sudan remain far below their potential, and for many northerners, not much better than conditions in some of the poorest countries in the world. It is imperative that the international community prepare itself to step up development assistance as well as private sector investment as Sudan's political standing improves and diplomatic relations are normalized.

Finally, we will continue to encourage the Government of Sudan to allow for more open political space, democratic norms, and greater respect for human rights, just as we do with all of Sudan's neighbours. We are aware of the irregularities and complaints surrounding the elections that took place last year. And we are concerned by the constraints on free speech and political activity. Sudan's future stability and prosperity is contingent on making steady progress on democracy and governance, and the government need only look to its northern neighbours to understand the ultimate consequences if it does not. It is in the interest of the United States and the Sudanese people to ensure the country succeeds.

In closing, I would like to reiterate our belief that there is no limit to what can be achieved if our African and international partners set our minds to it. Most people share the same broad goals: peace, freedom, security, the right to self determination, and the ability to pursue an economic livelihood. It is our job as diplomats to help people see that they can walk a common path to reach
these goals. The Sudanese people and governments did it in January, and I am confident they can continue doing so, if the will to make progress is there.