

The Sudan Referendum and Neighbouring Countries: Egypt and Uganda

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This PRIO Paper is the result of the joint Fafo and PRIO policy research project 'Egypt and Self-Determination for the Southern Sudan' funded by the Norwegian Peacebuilding Centre.

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Preface

The Sudan's (north and south) relations with Egypt and Uganda are in many respects opposites and they reflect the broad spectrum of the Sudan's foreign policy. Egypt is a former colonial master and closely connected to the political elites in Khartoum. In contrast, Uganda is a former colony and has been an important ally and sanctuary for the Southern Sudanese elites. These differences are also reflected in these two countries' position and policy towards the up-coming referendum over the future of Southern Sudan. Egypt has clearly signalled its preference for a united Sudan, but has waning leverage in the region and limited leverage over Sudanese. Uganda, on the other hand, tacitly desires an independent Southern Sudan and has considerable influence within the ruling party in the South, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement.

The two analyses presented here address the lack of up-dated in-depth research on regional politics and the Sudan's relations with neighbouring countries. Together they demonstrate that the Southern Sudanese referendum is a symptom of a shift in regional politics where the influence of countries like Uganda and Ethiopia are in ascension, and that the secession process adds momentum to this shift. The prospects of a new state in the Greater Horn of Africa also add to the regional tension and the Sudan continues to be regarded as a potentially destabilising element. An overall conclusion is that the neighbouring countries have a clear interest in contributing towards a peaceful transition in the Sudan.

This publication is a result of the joint Fafo and PRIO policy research project 'Egypt and Self-Determination for the Southern Sudan' funded by the Norwegian Peacebuilding Centre. Jacob Høigilt (Fafo) and Øystein H. Rolandsen (PRIO) have been the project leaders, while Åshild Falch's contribution was crucial to the research on Sudanese-Ugandan relations. The analyses are based on field visits to Cairo, Khartoum, Juba and Kampala during 2010, combined with data from news reports and relevant documents and reports. The project activities also included a one-day policy workshop in Oslo on Sudanese-Egyptian relations, which took place 14 October 2010. The outcome of this workshop is presented in a separate report available at PRIO and Noref's web-sites.

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Dilemmas and Inertia: Egypt's Foreign Policy and the Sudan's Uncertain Future¹

Jacob Høigilt (Fafo) & Øystein H. Rolandsen (PRIO)

Executive Summary

As a former coloniser and the Sudan's Nile-valley neighbour to the north, Egypt will inevitably be affected by the Sudan's political transition. As Egypt's regional influence appears to wane, the Sudan's increasing economic strength and the likely secession of Southern Sudan exemplify Egypt's overall difficulties in regard to the regional politics of the Horn of Africa and Nile Basin. Egyptian policy-makers and diplomats struggle with fundamental contradictions in Egypt's current regional status, competing priorities, and the need to stay on good terms with all political parties in the Sudan. To be able to balance domestic needs, relations with its immediate neighbours, and its role as a regional power Egypt must reshape its foreign policy; Egypt's national interests in the Sudan preclude neutrality in the processes ahead. It can however play a key role in a joint regional and international effort to secure the peaceful secession for Southern Sudan.

Historical Background

Egypt has a long and deep historical relationship with the Sudan. During the 19th century Egypt invaded, colonised and defined what would become the country named "the Sudan". As the junior partner in the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium (1899-1956), it continued to influence developments in the Sudan. During the period immediately following the Sudan's independence Egypt was intensely involved in Khartoum politics. That influence waned during the 1980s, particularly during Sadiq al-Mahdi's period as prime minister (1986-89).

The radical Islamist Hasan al-Turabi, who dominated the National Congress Party (NCP) during its first decade in power (1989-99), was even more critical of Egypt than al-Sadiq's government. Turabi had close connections with the opposition movement in Egypt, the Muslim Brothers, and pursued a policy of aggressive, expansionist Islamism. To the regime in Cairo this was a nightmare come true. Relations deteriorated during the early 1990s and reached an all-time low in 1995 when assassins – presumably abetted from within the Khartoum government – tried to kill President Mubarak. Egypt thereafter sought actively to undermine the NCP regime and openly supported northern and southern Sudanese opposition groups during the second half of the 1990s.

NCP leaders partly blame this support of the opposition for the concessions made in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the NCP regime in Khartoum and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). In this view, during the negotiations at Machakos in June-July 2002 Khartoum was too weak to resist the SPLM's demand for a fixed date for a referendum on Southern independence. This is of course an over-simplification and distortion of what actually happened. Still, the Egyptian policy increased the NCP's isolation domestically and regionally. This isolation combined with massive pressure from the US may explain the NCP's decision to sign the Machakos protocol, which opened for the Sudan Sudanese referendum. It is therefore debateable whether Egypt stood to gain from its support of the Sudanese opposition.

¹ This paper is part of a larger Noref-funded project focusing on Sudanese-Egyptian relations and regional security. Related publications and material are available at www.peacebuilding.no and <http://www.prio.no/Research-and-Publications/Project/?oid=62383039>. It is mainly based on information gathered through interviews in Cairo, Juba and Khartoum in February, May and June 2010 and during a Sudan-Egypt workshop in Oslo, 14 October 2010. Special thanks go to our research facilitator in Khartoum, Saad Ali Babiker.

The Machakos protocol is indeed a symptom not of Egypt's continuing influence over regional politics in general and in the Sudan in particular, but of its decline. In the period 1999-2002, Egypt's attempts to control the Sudanese peace process by launching an alternative negotiating forum was an embarrassing failure, and it was helpless to block the Machakos protocol after it was signed. Subsequent attempts by Egypt to make Southern Sudanese secession unattractive or to delay the referendum have likewise been unsuccessful.

Sudan's Uncertain Future

The deadline for holding the referendum is 9 January 2011. Although technical and legal preparations have been considerably delayed, the referendum is still expected to be held according to schedule. This opens up possibilities for a faulty process and opportunities to dispute the outcome. The referendum vote may therefore not be decisive. Instead, it may become merely a milestone in the more momentous process of deciding the terms of Southern Sudan's secession.

In recent months a belated debate on secession for Southern Sudan has started both within the Sudan and abroad. A high-level UN meeting in New York on 24 September 2010 resulted in strong international support for organising the referendum in January 2011; Salva Kiir, the Southern Sudanese leader, was triumphant when he returned to Juba.² Egypt has been notable for its absence from these discussions and has instead led other Arab states in a last attempt to win Southern support for maintaining the territorial unity of the Sudan.

The Sudan and the international community are far behind schedule in planning for the most likely outcome of the referendum: secession. A general reluctance even to discuss the possibility of an independent Southern Sudan has been one reason that negotiations over post-CPA arrangements have been delayed. It is therefore likely that the referendum will be held without previous agreement on vital issues such as the sharing of oil revenues, border demarcation, and the citizenship status of Southerners in the North. The issue of ownership and management of Nile water, which is of main concern to Egypt, will probably remain open until after the referendum.

A realistic best-case scenario is that negotiations result in a settlement on secession for the South, but these will involve haggling over the 'price' the SPLM has to pay the NCP for that outcome. An agreement will need compromises just as difficult as many of those reached in negotiating the CPA itself. The stakes are high, for both parties have a strong interest in maintaining some kind of peace. But they must convince their constituencies that they are getting the best deal possible and are selling themselves dearly. This is a recipe for brinkmanship and gambling over last-minute deals.

If negotiations are unsuccessful, an unintended escalation of conflict cannot be ruled out. Such an escalation may be triggered by skirmishes and local proxy wars in a context of mutual mistrust and massive military mobilization. Moreover, a secession process resulting in an internationally recognised Southern Sudanese state is no guarantee of peace. There are a number of issues that may lead to large scale violence in the Sudan (future developments in the "Three Areas" of disputed borderlands possibly presenting the greatest risk to stability in the North). The main effect of secession will be to diminish the risk of conflict between the NCP and the Southern Sudanese core of the SPLM/A. It is therefore important that neighbouring countries also focus on the post-CPA negotiations and on making *secession* attractive for both parties. Egypt has a choice of playing an active role in this process or remaining passive. Egypt has already made some investments and provided high-profile aid in the South, and President Mubarak has had meetings with Sudanese leaders to discuss the CPA process. But, there has been no broad and consistent diplomatic engagement.

Southern Sudanese Secession and Egyptian Security Policy

The Sudan is an important focus of Egypt's security portfolio, although issues related to developments in the Middle East and other North African states obviously compete for attention. The Sudan affects Egyptian

² First Vice President Salva Kiir Mayardit, 'Public Address on the Occasion of his return from the Official Visit to the United States of America', [transcript of speech], Juba, 1 October, 2010.

security in two ways. Firstly, since the Sudan shares a long border with Egypt, a certain degree of political stability in the Sudan is important. A relatively strong government in Khartoum prevents conflict from spilling over into Egypt and hinders the operation on Sudanese territory of militant Egyptian opposition.

Secondly, the Sudan is a somewhat unpredictable part of a larger regional security complex in which other countries play important roles. It is imperative for Egypt to have a government in Khartoum that is, at a minimum, not openly hostile, but preferably friendly and allied in regional processes. These are closely related to management of the Nile, but issues of mutual interest also go beyond water politics. It is to these other – perhaps less familiar – issues that we will now look more closely.

Egypt presumably favours a united Sudan at peace with itself and a regime in Khartoum with the ability to control its borders and prevent radical Egyptian Islamists from gaining sanctuary. There is no love lost between the regime of President Mubarak and the government in Khartoum, but the NCP leadership managed in 1999-2000 to jettison Hasan al-Turabi and stifle some of his aggressive rhetoric, is towing the Egyptian line in Nile negotiations, and is maintaining a degree of stability in the border regions (although failing significantly in Darfur). When considering the risks related to political transition and the lack of a convincing alternative, therefore, Egypt might see the *status quo* as acceptable and even preferable. In this view the CPA process is a problem for Egypt precisely because *both* of the likely outcomes – Southern separation and resumption of the war – are unfavourable alternatives to the *status quo*. The CPA process has itself presented a difficult balancing act in which Egypt has had to maintain good relations with the SPLM and the South in case of secession. Consequently, Cairo has kept an arm's length from the CPA process in order to hedge their bets.

An independent Southern Sudan and the separation process itself undoubtedly constitute a potential threat to Egypt. An independent Southern Sudan would be further removed from Egypt's sphere of influence. As a new Southern state might feel less inclined to turn to the Sudan's northern Arab neighbour for political support, so Ethiopia and the East African countries would gain influence over developments in the South in ways not necessarily consonant with Egyptian interests.

The prospect of an independent South under the sway of Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda is part of a troubling larger picture: Egyptian analysts and bureaucrats fear that Egypt might be squeezed between hostile neighbours to its northeast (Israel) and south (the riparian states led by Ethiopia and Uganda).³ There is a widespread belief in Egypt that Israel is trying to gain influence in Ethiopia and other countries bordering the Southern Sudan; some see the current political process in the Sudan as a step in isolating the two Arab countries – Egypt and the (northern) Sudan – on the African continent.

An independent Southern Sudan would also be an indirect threat by virtue of its impact on the North. The NCP regime's legitimacy is partly premised on its commitment to solving the "Southern Problem", but within a framework of continued national unity. Thus the NCP stands to lose whether the secession takes place peacefully or the process turns violent. In the first case, northern opposition forces might exploit the regime's failure over this all-important issue to direct attention to its other shortcomings (*inter alia*: war in Darfur, corruption, repression), and in the second, there is the chance of renewed all-out war. Each outcome would threaten to destabilize the Northern Sudan, which is one of Egypt's gravest fears.

Several commentators have noted difficulty in predicting how Southern secession would influence issues of identity and ideology in the North.⁴ Uncertainty notwithstanding, an Arab-Islamist tendency remains quite strong in the North. Traditional northern Sudanese political parties, including the Umma (the electoral vehicle of the Mahdist movement), have long been ambivalent over issues relating to the role of Islam. The ethnocentric party *al-Salam al-'Adil* (Just Peace) is small, but one of its prominent members, al-Tayyib Mustafa, is a cousin of President Bashir and editor of the strongly separatist daily *al-Intibaha*.⁵ NCP leaders in Khartoum might well be tempted to rely on the Islamist card to unite the remaining regions and forestall political opponents; almost all Northern Sudanese are Muslims, but not all are Arabs. The threat to

³ Interview with senior Egyptian policy analyst, Cairo, 8 March 2010.

⁴ Atta al-Battahani, "Sudan Votes: The 2010 Elections and Prospects for Democratic Transition", Heinrich Böll Stiftung, ed., *Sudan – No Easy Ways Ahead*, Berlin, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2010, <http://www.boell.de/publications/publications-publication-sudan-democracy-8961.html>

⁵ This newspaper reportedly has close ties to the security sector in and is one of the country's largest with a daily print run of 40,000, Interview with Sudanese media analyst in Khartoum, 16 May 2010.

Egypt's security posed by radical Islamism in the Sudan was amply illustrated during the 1990s, when Egyptian Islamists involved in a bloody conflict with the regime reportedly smuggled weapons over the Sudanese border. Weapons smuggling remains a problem. In March 2009, the Israeli air force destroyed a convoy of 23 vehicles carrying arms through Sudan and Egypt that were probably destined for Gaza.

In case of renewed war between Northern and Southern Sudan, the immediate threat to Egypt's security would be attempts at destabilising the North. SPLM leaders openly state that an important element in a war strategy would be mobilising and uniting militant political forces on the peripheries of Northern Sudan.⁶ During the 1983-2005 war the SPLM had allies among the Khartoum opposition and in several regions (notably the Nuba Mountains, Southern Blue Nile and Eastern Sudan). The SPLM's focus on the South and on secession may have estranged some Northern allies who favoured a united and reformed Sudan, but it might still be able to cause significant disruption in the North and threaten the NCP regime. Egypt's border control and internal security could be adversely affected if the NCP lost its grip on power and the Khartoum government crumbled.

In a renewed north-south conflict, Egypt would also be forced to choose sides, and would lose no matter which side won. During the civil war, Cairo co-operated with the Northern opposition and nurtured contacts with the Southern opposition by letting it open offices in Egypt and accepting large numbers of refugees. This time around Egypt might choose to buttress the current regime in order to avoid a security vacuum in Northern Sudan. Siding thus with the NCP regime would result, however, in alienating the current (and potential future) leaders of both Northern and Southern Sudan. There is also the wider regional picture to consider. It is likely that Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda would side with Southern Sudan and the Northern opposition. If Egypt supported the sitting NCP regime in a future conflict it would thus distance itself further from leading states in the region.

The Nile Dimension

Egypt's foreign policy towards Africa is deeply intertwined with the multilateral management of the Nile, an issue at the centre also of Egypt's relations with the Sudan. Egypt gets practically all of its water from the Nile. It is very sensitive to any political developments in the Nile basin that might affect the flow of Nile waters. Regional tensions over water management and distribution have grown lately. Together with Sudan, Egypt is facing unprecedented pressure from the other Nile countries to amend existing treaties regulating water distribution. This was demonstrated when, in May 2010, following failed negotiations at Sharm al-Shaykh, Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Kenya took the unprecedented step of signing a new Nile agreement without Egypt and Sudan. Although predominantly symbolic, this demonstrated ominously their impatience.

An independent Southern Sudan would exacerbate this problem by adding another player to the game of Nile politics, which already involves an unmanageable number of states. Southern Sudan might choose to align itself with countries – Ethiopia, Uganda and Tanzania – strongly at odds with Egypt over the Nile issue. Although Southern Sudan would have little ability (or even desire) to restrict water flow in the short term, Egypt's already isolated position in Nile negotiations would be further weakened.

Some experts belittle the importance of the Southern Sudan in Nile politics because it is the Blue Nile, rising in Ethiopia, which provides Egypt with 85 per cent of its total Nile flow. But Egyptian policy-makers seem to regard the White Nile as a vital strategic asset, and they currently pursue the dual policy of providing aid to the Southern Sudan and applying pressure on its government to conform to Egyptian designs for Nile development in the South. The aid consists of establishment of medical centres, hydroelectric power stations and schools in the South, while the main development plans are connected to the Jonglei Canal, a scheme begun in the 1970s to bypass the southern swamplands and thus increase the amount of the White Nile's water reaching Aswan

It is unlikely that Southern politicians could gain acceptance for re-invigorating the Jonglei Canal project even if they wanted to. The canal could have serious ecological effects; significant parts of the wetlands

⁶ Luka Biong Deng, "Sudanese perspectives on the 2011 referendum", speech given at PRIO, Oslo, 13 October 2010, <http://www.prio.no/Videos/Post.aspx>.

might dry up, with dire consequences for biodiversity. The most controversial political consequence would be the likely disruption of the livelihood of local cattle-herders. In the 1980s, the area's population was estimated at between 500,000 and 800,000.⁷ Opposition from these people might pose a considerable problem for the authorities in Juba, who are already struggling with insecurity and violence in large parts of the South. Egypt's pressure to complete construction of the Jonglei canal risks alienating Southern leaders trying to maintain a fine balance of upstream, downstream and local interests.

Moreover, Northern Sudan itself might not remain a complaisant partner in Egypt's struggle for control of the Nile. From Khartoum's perspective the ideal solution would be extended Sudanese cooperation with both Egypt and Ethiopia.⁸ The North has much to gain from cooperating closely with Ethiopia: if Ethiopia builds dams, the flow of the Nile would be better controlled, and the Sudan could buy the hydroelectric power Ethiopia produced. It is an open question how long Khartoum can afford to support Egypt's rigid position; in the water and energy areas Egypt, unlike Ethiopia, offers few incentives for cooperation.

The crucial point in the analysis is indeed that Egypt's current stance on the Nile issue is not sustainable in the long run. Its efforts to preclude changes to the existing Nile agreements are of little consequence; Egypt's current social and economic structure will make water scarce very soon. Additional water allocations would be insufficient to supply Egypt's projected increase in consumption during the coming years.⁹ Some measures may be taken to increase the amount of water reaching Egypt, but there is still an upper limit to the amounts available.

The main dilemma for Egypt is how to make its economy less water-intensive.¹⁰ This requires much more than just a change in Egypt's Nile policies, and includes a re-focus away from the narrow question of water allotment to issues of regional cooperation. Egypt is after all a regional heavyweight and it could earn goodwill regionally and in the international community generally by using its Nile expertise more extensively to contribute to development for all the riparian countries.

Sudanese Perspectives and Strategies

A new and potentially disruptive development is the Sudan's emergence from under Egypt's shadow. Concurrent with Egypt's declining regional status, the Sudan's oil has boosted its GDP and won it new allies in China and the Arab world. Analysis of Southern and Northern Sudanese elite perception of Egypt and its relevance to the Sudan suggests that Egypt's influence has diminished notably.¹¹ Also, Sudanese-Egyptian relations are viewed rather differently in Juba and Khartoum, and even among the elites in Khartoum views vary.

Historically, the Khartoum-centred Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and its leaders in the Mirghani family have had close connections with Egypt, but the DUP's influence has drastically declined during the last two decades. Indeed, the DUP's continued association with Egypt has contributed to that party's increasing irrelevance. In contrast, the Umma, as the party of the Mahdist movement, was founded on resistance to Egypt. While Khartoum elites have close if ambiguous relations with Egypt, Southern Sudanese leaders perceive Egypt as distant and irrelevant. Some older Southern politicians and military officers received education and training in Egypt, but this exposure has not necessarily fostered any loyalty or reverence.

Northern and Southern Sudanese intellectuals share a general perception of the current Egyptian government as manipulative and view Egypt's engagement with the Sudan as based strictly on self-interest. Several Northern Sudanese intellectuals suggest that the Egyptian strategy is to maintain the Sudan's territorial integrity in order to keep its elites preoccupied with maintaining control – the goal: a “big and weak” Sudan.

⁷ Adil Mustafa Ahmad, “Post-Jonglei planning in southern Sudan: combining environment with development,” *Environment and Urbanization* 20, no. 2, 2008, pp. 575-86.

⁸ Interview with senior official in Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resources, Khartoum, 19 May 2010.

⁹ Interview with international water consultant, Cairo, 10 March 2010.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ This analysis is based on interviews in Khartoum and Juba in May and June 2010, supplemented with news reports and other relevant documentation. However, analysis of how Sudanese perceive Egypt's importance in their country is difficult. Such perceptions may or may not be based on fact, and most Sudanese politicians would emphasise the country's autonomy and minimize Egyptian influence over the Sudan's domestic and foreign policies.

Suspicion appears to dominate Sudanese-Egyptian relations. Their chequered past and Cairo's fear of future NCP radicalisation have resulted in distancing the two regimes. The NCP may fear that Egypt would be quick to support a viable alternative to the current regime as soon as one emerged. For its part, it is a priority of the NCP government in Khartoum to diversify its foreign relations. Other Arab countries and China are the main targets of this strategy, but maintaining good relations with the US also continues to be important. The expanding oil economy has opened up new opportunities and changed the priorities of the Khartoum government.

Although the NCP tries as far as possible to avoid provoking Cairo, crossing Egypt is regarded as less dangerous than in the past. One possible exception to the loosening ties between the two governments has allegedly involved Egypt's role in the close cooperation between US and Sudanese security agencies as a part of the "war on terror". The extent and importance of this cooperation – and of Egypt's role – is not fully known. Interaction in the intelligence sector does not appear to affect Sudanese-Egyptian relations at a more general level.

In terms of Nile issues, successive Sudanese governments, and even the NCP, have aligned themselves with Egypt and internalised the Egyptian 'downstream' perspective. There are indications that this is about to change: Northern Sudanese increasingly see the Sudan as a mid-stream country and as competitors with Egypt for Nile water; several people interviewed in Khartoum by the present authors raised the issue of the 1959 agreement's legitimacy. Others more mildly see a possible future role as a bridge or mediator between the upstream countries and Egypt.

The Sudan's search for new allies in the Arab world and beyond, as well as its own improved economy involves both an interest in challenging Egypt on Nile issues and increasing ability to do so. Southern Sudanese for their part lack a strong commitment to Egyptian Nile policies and to any Nile agreements signed by Khartoum. The controversies surrounding the Jonglei Canal project have increased suspicion of Egypt's intentions in the South. Egypt will need to strike tough bargains with governments in Khartoum and Juba in order to ensure continued Sudanese commitment to Egyptian water security.

The current situation results in a general wariness in both Cairo-Khartoum and Cairo-Juba relations. There is little Egypt can do as a bi-lateral player in the process of Southern Sudanese secession. Its main role lies in cooperating with other countries in the region and assisting the parties in reaching a mutually acceptable agreement on the terms of separation.

Conclusion: Egypt's Dilemmas and Policy Options

Based on the above analyses it is possible to discern three dilemmas facing Egypt in its current and future policy towards the Sudan. The first problem is Egypt's waning influence in the region – and in particular over the Sudan – even as that country assumes increased strategic importance in Egypt's security calculations. This problem is exacerbated by Egypt's lack of a cohesive foreign policy apparatus. The security sector has a strong influence over Egypt's foreign policy and diplomatic activity. Regarding Sudan policy, this seems to have injected an element of competition between security personnel and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The result is a lack of co-ordination that makes it difficult to prioritise and focus resources, in particular when the regional setting is changing rapidly and there are no obvious strategies or choices available. Consequently, Egypt has an immediate policy concern, but lacks the institutional apparatus adequately to address it. This only compounds the general scepticism towards Egypt among Sudanese politicians.

Secondly, Egypt's domestic security interests in Sudan demand a strong government in Khartoum. But in terms of Nile management it is desirable to have a Sudan that is unassertive of its own midstream policy. In the event of worsening bilateral relations in general, moreover, a hostile and overweening regime south of the border is obviously undesirable. It is therefore difficult for Egypt to find an approach that promotes a Sudanese government that is strong domestically and at the same time unassertive and malleable when it comes to regional politics.

Finally, Egypt has a clear interest in a united Sudan, but needs at the same time to prepare for the likely scenario of Southern secession. It is difficult to balance these two goals: to avoid estranging the Northern

elite Egypt should not put itself in a position of seeming to contribute towards splitting the Sudan, but if it tries to hinder secession it will alienate the Southern leadership and even increase the likelihood of renewed war in the Sudan. From a short term perspective, Cairo may therefore remain aloof from the referendum and post-CPA negotiations.

In a narrow and short-term perspective, it is possible to argue that a perpetually unresolved situation in Southern Sudan would be preferable for Egypt. Stagnation in Southern Sudan would preoccupy Khartoum. But in the longer run, an impasse in the post-CPA negotiations entails the danger of regional instability and proliferation of conflict, which might to a much greater extent than an independent South jeopardise Egyptian security and the satisfactory sharing of Nile water.

A war that starts in Southern Sudan and spreads to the North might result in a breakdown of government control in territory south of the Egyptian border. This would be a serious security threat to Egypt, involve the likelihood of large numbers of Sudanese refugees, and would close a valuable foreign market to Egyptian companies. The safest long-term strategy for Egypt is therefore to contribute towards a peaceful Southern Sudanese secession.

Egypt may have too much vested interest and historical baggage to play the role of neutral broker in post-CPA negotiations, but as a regional power and a neighbouring country Egypt may certainly make a difference in the process. Egypt needs to adapt to the new reality, abandon the outdated bilateral approach, and instead work in concert with other countries in the region and with the international community. Egypt could for instance signal that it sees Southern secession as the likely outcome of the CPA process. It could then become more actively involved in convincing the NCP to reach a reasonable agreement with the SPLM.

For this to happen, it is important that the international community engage Egypt and ensure that it acts as a friendly neighbour and a facilitator for an independent Southern Sudan. The “Troika” largely responsible for brokering the CPA (the US, UK and Norway) and other countries involved in the post-CPA process might more actively seek to involve Egypt in these processes, and could possibly also take more unequivocal positions. An open and multilateral approach to Egypt’s interaction with the Sudan could be an important contribution to peace and regional stability.

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Too Close for Comfort? Uganda and the Southern Sudanese Referendum¹

Åshild Falch & Øystein H. Rolandsen (PRIO)

Executive Summary

Despite its relatively small size, relations with Uganda are important for the Sudan. The government of Uganda, and President Yoweri Museveni in particular, have strong ties to the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), and are regarded as among its key foreign supporters. The SPLM needs Uganda's help in preparing for – and will need it after – the long-awaited referendum that in January 2011 will decide whether Southern Sudan will separate from Northern Sudan. Meanwhile, despite a rapprochement in 2001, relations between Kampala and Khartoum have gradually worsened and appear now to be strained. Regardless of its outcome, the referendum will undoubtedly affect future relations between Uganda and the Sudan (north and south). This briefing examines the Ugandan government's interests, engagements and strategies in the Sudan, and analyses how its policies will affect post-referendum developments in the Sudan.

Historical Relations between Uganda and the Sudan

Although the Sudan and Uganda share a border (and a history of British rule), the two civil wars in Southern Sudan forced the governments in Khartoum and Kampala to develop more active policies towards each other. In the 1960s, the first civil war brought Southern Sudanese refugees and exiled politicians to Uganda. This created a dilemma for the Ugandan government, which wanted to give sanctuary to its African "brothers", but needed to maintain cordial relations with successive regimes in Khartoum. During the turbulent 1980s, many Ugandans fled to the Sudan. By a turn of the screw, when in the 1980s the Sudan's second civil war reached the border areas, Ugandan refugees returned home and once again Southern Sudanese sought refuge in Uganda. There is still some uncertainty as to who threw the first stone in the proxy war that developed between Khartoum and Kampala. President Museveni's personal friendship with the SPLM/A's long-time leader, John Garang, dated to the 1960s, and Museveni may have supported Garang in the late 1980s, even before Khartoum began arming dissidents in northern Uganda. In the early 1990s, after the Islamist regime of Hasan al-Turabi and President Omar al-Bashir was established, Sudanese-Ugandan relations deteriorated. By the mid-1990s Uganda, like Eritrea and Ethiopia, had become a strong supporter of the SPLM/A. Concurrently, the regime in Khartoum started training, feeding and arming Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Khartoum and Kampala's reciprocal support for rebellion contributed to large-scale violence and disruption in northern Uganda and intensification of civil war in Southern Sudan.

In early 2002, probably as a consequence of US pressure, Khartoum claimed an end to its support of the LRA and allowed the Ugandan army to fight Kony and his supporters on Sudanese soil. Although the icy relations between Bashir and Museveni thawed somewhat in the period 2000-2002, Museveni's continued support for the SPLM/A and the general distrust between the two leaders hindered real reconciliation. The government of Uganda was an important and active supporter of the peace talks that resulted in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), and during the post-conflict period it has actively buttressed the SPLM and the autonomous Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS).

¹ The analysis is mainly based on information gathered through interviews in Kampala, Juba and Khartoum in May and June 2010. Special thanks go to our research facilitator in Kampala, Paul Twebaze.

Uganda and the Referendum Process

The Ugandan government's involvement in the Southern Sudanese referendum process and its aftermath has two main motives: first, security concerns over the continuing existence of the LRA, and the implications of renewed internal conflict in the Southern Sudan; and second, socio-political and economic interests in re-orienting the Southern Sudan towards eastern Africa and expanding Ugandan trade opportunities there. Added to these interests is President Museveni's personal ambition to remain in power and take a lead in regional integration. Developments since 2005 – in particular the death of John Garang and the subsequent failure to 'make unity attractive' in the Sudan – have made it obvious instead that the Southerners will opt for separation.

Uganda's Sudan policy is shaped and managed by President Museveni. Although his contacts with the GoSS President, Salva Kiir Mayardit, are nothing like his close relations with Garang, the two communicate regularly. Diplomatic relations are well maintained through a Ugandan consulate in Juba and GoSS liaison offices in Kampala and Gulu. Uganda has developed strategic cooperation with the GoSS through institutional and military capacity building, including training of civil servants in the Southern Sudan. The Ugandan government officially maintains a "wait and see" attitude and stands by its commitment to respect any outcome of the referendum, as long as it is conducted in a free and fair manner. But Uganda's interest in Southern secession is clear, and while its engagements in Southern Sudan are described as encouraging and assisting the GoSS to prepare for self-determination, its contacts with the regime in Khartoum can be characterized as limited and rather uneasy.

Maintaining Peace and Security

At the core of the Ugandan government's interest in Southern Sudan's referendum process is its aim to create peace and stability in the region. Even though the LRA has not operated on Ugandan soil since 2008, its size, organization and the exact location of its members remain unknown; the rebel group continues to be a cross-border security threat (Schomerus & Allen 2010:65). It is widely believed in Southern Sudan and Uganda that Khartoum is continuing to support the LRA both logistically and militarily. Although evidence is lacking of such direct support, it is not unlikely that the Khartoum regime would re-deploy the LRA as a proxy force against the SPLM and Uganda if armed conflict between Northern and Southern Sudan resumed (Hemmer 2010:3). As a high-ranking government official close to Museveni put it, "the government in Sudan has a great interest in keeping the LRA alive, and the purpose of deploying them again could be to disorganize the referendum, to fight against Uganda, or to destabilize Juba."

During the past decade, cooperation with the US has been an important part of Museveni's strategy to protect Uganda's security interests. Although not arming the Southerners directly, the US government backs the SPLM/A, and Uganda has served as a broker for this support. Shortly after the attacks of 11 September 2001, Uganda adopted anti-terrorism legislation, and it has since been a close ally of the US in the fight against international terrorism (Dagne 2009:9; Hemmer 2010:4). During "Operation Iron Fist" against the LRA in 2002, the US offered logistical and military support to the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF). There is considerable sympathy within the US government and American public opinion for the Southerners' cause, and Uganda may be useful as a channel for US support to Southern Sudan if its independence is contested.

Uganda fears that the LRA might be used in renewed armed conflict in the Sudan. Both Khartoum and the SPLM are openly increasing their military capacity in the event of war between North and South. The Northerners' main foreign ally and arms provider is China; Uganda offers training to SPLA soldiers and allows arms and supplies to be transported through Ugandan territory. If the result of the referendum is acknowledged both by the north and the south, however, Khartoum's incentive to support the LRA could vanish, and the strength of the Ugandan rebel group in Southern Sudan and neighboring countries could wane. Consequently, a peaceful referendum process should be regarded by the Ugandan government as vital to reining in the LRA and maintaining peace in the region.

Pulling Southerners towards the East

There has been considerable interaction between the people of Uganda and Southern Sudan in many ways, including trade, education and the mutual hosting of refugees. Since the signing of the CPA, Ugandan exports to Southern Sudan have expanded enormously; Ugandans are currently assumed to constitute the largest foreign population there. Southern Sudanese have a significant presence in Uganda: many

Southerners, including GoSS officials, were educated, own property and houses, and send their children to school there. Although ethnically diverse, Southern Sudanese and Ugandans generally identify themselves as "black Africans", as opposed to the Arabs who dominate Northern Sudan. Numerous sources in Uganda point to an underlying assumption that, in the event of Southern Sudanese independence, the new country and its people will gravitate towards East Africa. President Museveni himself is known as a pan-Africanist strongly opposed to Arab domination over the Southern Sudanese.

The Southern Sudanese referendum is intrinsically related to Uganda's economic interests in the area. Ugandan traders have benefited from the relative stability in Southern Sudan since ratification of the CPA and removal of the LRA from the border region (Leopold 2009: 474; Hemmer 2010:4). In view of the decades-long Sudanese civil war and Southern Sudan's economic marginalisation during that period, peace has created demand for all sorts of goods there (Titeca 2009:10). Trade in basic commodities and shipment of construction material from Uganda to Juba have exploded. Small-scale Ugandan traders are continuously on the move between Uganda and Juba, profiting from price differentials; in order to avoid taxation, most of this trade is informal (Titeca 2009:3). Furthermore, Uganda has been a key partner in developing the booming bottled- water industry in Southern Sudan, and the GoSS has even allotted land in Juba to the Ugandan government for a 1.7 billion shilling market for Ugandan traders (ICG 2010:5-6). Although mostly restricted to the South, Sudan is now one of Uganda's largest export markets: in 2008 its official exports totaled an estimated USD 260 million (Mugabe 2010), while the Ugandan central bank estimates that these figures are dwarfed by the informal which possibly amounts to as much as USD 170 million per month (Cropley 2010).

Since 2005 the Ugandan government has worked to integrate Southern Sudan into the economy of the East African Community (EAC). Uganda's interest in regional economic integration is materializing through improvement of the communication infrastructure between Uganda and Southern Sudan. A tarmac road between Juba and Nimule (on the Ugandan border) is already under construction with support from USAID. The Ugandan Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Regional Cooperation reports that Uganda recently received USD 60 million from Japan to construct a road from Nimule to Gulu. Feasibility of a railway between Juba and Kampala, and onwards to the port of Lamu in Kenya, is under study. The government in Khartoum has attempted to protect Northern Sudanese trade interests in the South by imposing custom barriers on the Sudan-Uganda border, despite a free-trade agreement between the two countries. A prevailing assumption is that an independent Southern Sudan would further distance itself economically from Northern Sudan, and lower trade barriers and strengthen regional cooperation with neighboring countries, for instance through membership in the EAC. Continued unity or resumption of war in the Sudan, on the other hand, would likely limit or block trade routes between Uganda and Southern Sudan. Hence, the Ugandan government also has economic interests in supporting a peaceful Southern Sudanese secession.

Uneasy Relations with Khartoum

In contrast to the Ugandan government's strategy to maintain and expand cooperation with Southern Sudan in the run-up to the referendum, its relations with the regime in Khartoum – already characterized by deep-rooted mistrust (Hemmer 2010:3) – have deteriorated during the past few years. Leaders of the Sudan's ruling National Congress Party (NCP) appear displeased with what they regard as Uganda's overt encouragement of secession in Southern Sudan. For its part, Khartoum is accused of continuing to support the LRA, which Uganda still considers a security threat (Hemmer 2010:3). President Museveni sent a clear signal when he did not attend Bashir's inauguration in May 2010, but visited Juba for Salva Kiir's inauguration as GoSS President later that month. Unlike some other African countries, Uganda has signaled that it will be obliged by the International Criminal Court's (ICC) indictment of President Bashir to arrest him if he sets foot on Ugandan soil. Fear of arrest kept Bashir from an African Union summit in Kampala in July 2010, and no Sudanese ministers attended. Even if there were hope for rapprochement between Kampala and Khartoum once President Bashir is out of office, the secession process is bound to exacerbate differences between the two regimes.

Uganda's Role in the Post-Referendum Context

While there are several ways the referendum process may evolve, some scenarios are more probable than others. Although the Sudan's Government of National Unity, dominated by the NCP, has launched a last-minute effort to convince Southerners to vote for unity, this is unlikely to affect the outcome of the referendum significantly; it remains highly likely that a majority will vote for secession. Yet, if the national elections in April 2010 were a dry run for the referendum, irregularities before and during the event are inevitable. Regardless of the official result, there will be ample opportunity for both the NCP and the SPLM to dispute it. Owing to their late start, negotiations over post-referendum arrangements will not be completed before it is held. These talks could result in a settlement on secession for the South, an outcome, however, that would require international pressure and considerable SPLM concessions over territory, oil revenue and Southerners' rights in the North. If negotiations are unsuccessful, on the other hand, the chances of unintended escalation of conflict will increase. The referendum process will affect relations between Uganda and the Sudan (north and south) one way or the other, and subsequent developments will determine Uganda's policy options in regard to the Sudan.

Scenario 1: Southern Sudan opts for secession, which is recognized by Khartoum

A likely post-referendum scenario is that the Southern Sudan, having opted for secession, is after a negotiated settlement eventually recognized by the regime in Khartoum. In this event, relations between the governments of Uganda and Southern Sudan are likely to remain close, and Uganda would continue to be a predominant political and economic partner of its neighbor in the north. As a Ugandan Minister stated, "Uganda is like the midwife of the birth of this new nation, and we are hoping that the newborn baby will be healthy and bouncy. Uganda will support Southern Sudan in all possible ways if it secedes from the north". Meanwhile the Ugandan government will probably engage in further capacity-building and increased efforts at economic integration.

Uganda's engagement after secession would depend largely on conditions in Southern Sudan. A weak and underdeveloped state apparatus, which in the run-up to the referendum has been struggling to provide security and control local violence could be prey to unintended escalation of internal conflict between competing groups or personalities. Owing to a proliferation of arms and lawlessness along Southern Sudan's borders, the effects of instability might easily spill over into Uganda. The Ugandan government would try to prevent this, if necessary by military means and material support for the SPLM.

Uganda's own domestic politics could affect relations with an independent Southern Sudan. Opposition politicians from northern Uganda have for some time expressed discontent with Museveni's policies which, they claim, neglect their regions. Northern Ugandans may feel a stronger connection with Southern Sudan than with southern Uganda; some northern politicians have expressed interest in northern Uganda's amalgamating with Southern Sudan in the event of the latter's secession. In that event, Mark Leopold (2009:474) has argued, northern Ugandans would "find even stronger reasons for wanting to ally themselves across the borders, rather than with the south of the country", and Green (2008:5) has gone so far as to hold that northern Ugandan politicians' own talk of secession is related to a possible secession of Southern Sudan. One scenario thus posits politicians from northern Uganda seeking an alliance with the GoSS. "While it at the moment may appear far-fetched", a Ugandan researcher has envisioned, "an event in which Juba supports a rebel group to help Northern Ugandans to fight Museveni's government might still materialise".

Scenario 2: An inconclusive referendum and the threat of a Southern Sudanese unilateral declaration of independence

While the referendum is likely to take place, one of the parties might well contest its outcome. If the regime in Khartoum unreasonably disputed the results or if post-referendum negotiations between Khartoum and Juba stalled, a scenario in which the GoSS opted for a unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) might unfold. In this event, Uganda could be expected to be one of the first countries to recognize Southern Sudan as an independent state. Khartoum, for its part, might decide that UDI was sufficient reason to attack Southern Sudan. The possibility of Khartoum's re-deploying the LRA as a proxy force against Uganda (as SPLM's closest ally) would likely lead Uganda to support Southern Sudan militarily against Khartoum and the LRA. While vehemently asserting that Uganda would not support a unilateral Southern declaration because it would contravene the CPA, a Ugandan Minister has explained that Uganda would not hesitate to back a Southern Sudanese UDI if Khartoum illegitimately disputed the referendum result.

Conclusion

In the January 2011 referendum process, Uganda's tacit, but strong support for Southern Sudanese independence and its close co-operation with the SPLM give important assurance to Salva Kiir and the GoSS in negotiations over secession and post-referendum arrangements. Continued support from Uganda is certainly in the interest of the SPLM, but whether Uganda's current (and seemingly unreserved) support for and engagement with the SPLM is consonant with Uganda's own overall goal of creating peace and stability in the region remains an open question.

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The Sudan Referendum and Neighbouring Countries: Egypt and Uganda

This report examines the Ugandan and Egyptian governments' interests, engagements and strategies in the Sudan, and, vice-versa, Sudanese actors' perspectives and analyses of how these two countries affect post-referendum developments in the Sudan.

Egypt's regional influence appears to wane, while the Sudan's increasing economic strength and the likely secession of Southern Sudan exemplify Egypt's overall difficulties in regard to the regional politics of the Horn of Africa and Nile Basin. Egyptian

policy-makers and diplomats struggle with fundamental contradictions in Egypt's current regional status, competing priorities, and the need to stay on good terms with all political parties in the Sudan. Egypt's national interests in the Sudan preclude neutrality in the processes ahead. It can however play a key role in a joint regional and international effort to secure the peaceful secession for Southern Sudan.

Relations with Uganda are important for the Sudan. The government of Uganda, and President Yoweri Museveni in particular, are key foreign

supporters to the Government of Southern Sudan. It needs Uganda's help in preparing for – and will need it after – the long-awaited referendum that in January 2011. Meanwhile, despite a rapprochement around the year 2000, relations between Kampala and Khartoum have gradually worsened and appear now to be strained.

Regardless of its outcome, the referendum will undoubtedly affect future relations between Uganda, Egypt and the Sudan (north and south).