

Obama Second Term: Implications for Sudan and Sudan Relations

Saturday 17 November 2012

By Luka Biong Deng

In September 2012, I wrote a piece on the implications of the US elections to the relations between Sudan and South Sudan. Now Obama has been elected for the second term of four years in the White House with more freedom and space to make a difference and to leave a legacy at home and in the world. While the US elections are for Americans, the outcome of these elections affects directly or indirectly the rest of the world. The victory of Obama for the second term has generally been received with much optimism all over the world with each country assessing the implications of such development. Certainly, Obama will focus on addressing domestic economic challenges and putting the US economy on the recovery track but he will focus as well on foreign issues.

Generally the US elections are very illuminating and educative with democracy being practiced by the most powerful democratic nation. How much I am so happy about the outcome of the US elections and the victory of Obama, I was so impressed by the process and articulation of the two competing visions on the role and size of government. While the Republican Party sees individualism as a drive for lifting yourself up, the Democrat Party sees America as one family that can lift itself up through collective efforts. The difference between the two visions was well articulated by Obama in his victory speech when he stated that "...while each of us will pursue our own individual dreams, we are an American family, and we rise or fall together as one nation and as one people,.....What makes America exceptional are the bonds that hold together the most diverse nation on Earth, the belief that our destiny is shared"

These competing visions are so relevant to the rest of the world, particularly in the context of financial crisis that exposed the fragility of the free-market economy and individualism as the only drive for prosperity. This makes the vision of Democratic Party of seeing state as a family so appealing to most countries, particularly to the new nation of South Sudan. The essence of African family is the social bonds and solidarity that sustain the African societies overtime. Some countries such as Rwanda have used their traditions and values as the basis for economic governance. The people of South Sudan have enormous bonding social capital upon which the building of the new nation, creation of wealth and its distribution can be based.

While the domestic challenges will dominate the second term of Obama, there will be more focus on foreign policy as global stability and peace are so detrimental to the US national security. One of the quotes from the 2012 US Presidential elections stated that "Dear America, the rest of the world says: Choose Obama". Indeed the rest of the world was unambiguously happier that the people of the US reelected Obama for the second term in the White House. In fact Obama has captured not only the America's imagination but also the world's imagination through his unwavering hope to capture the future as reflected in his popular slogan "yes, we can" in the face of financial crisis and global pessimism in 2008. This is well articulated in his high minded victory speech when he said "I have always believed that hope is that stubborn thing inside us that insists....that something better awaits us so long as we have the courage to keep reaching, to keep working, to keep fighting".

Definitely the victory of Obama for the regime in Khartoum is less painful than that of Governor Romney. While Romney focused less on the affairs of the rest of the world during his election campaign, he was keen to use tougher approach in dealing with some of the reckless and tyrant Islamic states such as Iran and Sudan. In fact one would have wished that the Arab Spring to start in Iran and Sudan which are governed by a brand of political Islam that destabilizes the world and produces terrorism, radicalism, hatred and intolerance. While America as the most diverse nation on the Earth is getting stronger and more prosperous by embracing diversity as a virtue, these countries that adopted political Islam such as Sudan see diversity as a curse.

With the victory of Obama, Khartoum is more worried as the business may not be as usual. In the second term, Obama may become tougher on the issues that he avoided in the first term, particularly in relation to Iran and Sudan. Obama is likely to adopt similar approach that Romney would have adopted towards Iran and Sudan. The timely decision by Obama to renew sanctions against Sudan is a clear message to the regime in Khartoum to expect more if it continues with its engagement in terrorist activities. If Obama chooses Susan Rice rather than John Kerry to head State Department, then the message to the regime in Khartoum would be even clearer.

The regime in Khartoum will soon enter into confrontation with international community over the final status of Abyei, disputed and claimed border areas, humanitarian access to Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile as well as in the implementation of the nine agreements recently signed with South Sudan. On the final status of Abyei and the disputed and claimed border areas, the AU will soon endorse the proposals from the AU Panel as final and binding. The regime in Khartoum is likely to reject these proposals. Equally, the regime in Khartoum seems to link the full implementation of the nine agreements with

security arrangements, particularly its emphasis on disengagement between SPLM-North and South Sudan. Also the deliberate policy of Khartoum to deny humanitarian access and to starve to death the people of the two states will increase anger of the international community. While the demand by Khartoum for disengagement is not provided for in the nine agreements, the South and international community will soon be angered if Khartoum continues to insist on disengagement as a prerequisite for the implementation of the nine agreements. Recently, Khartoum made it clear to the South that its oil will not flow through its territory unless the issues of security are resolved.

The recent destruction of arms factory in Khartoum has clearly exposed the intrinsic link between terrorist organizations such as Hamas and the regime in Khartoum. Equally, the Iranian warships that docked in Sudan after the destruction of arms factory has not only angered the Arab world but exposed dangerous relations between the two regimes in Khartoum and Tehran. These links between the regime in Khartoum and terrorist organizations and Iran will make Obama to revisit the US intelligence cooperation with Khartoum. It is most likely that the new administration of Obama may review its policy of the unknown devil is worse than the known one.

On the other hand the victory of Obama for the second term was not celebrated in South in the same way as in 2008 when Obama created history as the first African American ever to be elected to the White House. Maybe the people of South Sudan were expecting more from Obama not only because his ancestors hailed from the South but also as a new nation that needs more support in building their new state from scratch. The people of the South expect Obama to do more in his second term and to leave behind a legacy as one of the architects who contributed to making South Sudan a success story. Although one expects the new administration of Obama to give special attention to the South, the growing concerns about human rights situation in the South may taint this special relation between Juba and Washington. The long struggle of the people of South Sudan for justice, dignity and rights can not only be honoured by improving the human rights records but by becoming exemplary in respecting these rights for which we fought and lost many lives.

One expects the new administration of Obama will work towards encouraging good relations between Sudan and South Sudan by encouraging the parties to fully implement the nine agreements and to accept the AU proposals for resolving the final status of Abyei and claimed and disputed border areas. The failure of each party to implement these agreements or reject these proposals may push the new administration of Obama to be tougher. Besides these pending issues, the Obama administration will be keen on the issues related to constitutional review, democratic transformation and status of human rights in the two countries as the basis for building sustainable good relations.

Luka Biong Deng is the South Sudanese Co-Chair of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee and a senior member of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). This article was originally published by the New Nation Newspaper.