

## Salva-Bashir Summit: What is expected?

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January 3, 2013 - Presidents Salva and Bashir will meet on 4th January 2013 in a summit that is widely expected to be decisive and final in giving the last chance for the two countries. This summit came as result of the last meeting of the AU Peace and Security Council that calls for such a summit as the last chance for the two countries to resolve amicably all the pending issues. The diplomatic shuttling by the Ethiopian Prime Minister between Khartoum and Juba has hastened the convening of the summit earlier before the next meeting of the AU Council at the level of heads of state.

Most people of the two countries, particularly the people of the South, have lost confidence in these summits as similar summits raised only expectations but did not yield tangible results. In particular, the last summit between Salva and Bashir in which nine (9) agreements were signed raised hope but with pain in the South that their oil will start flowing for export through Sudan. However, such hopes were dashed by Khartoum when it refused to allow the oil of the South to be exported through its territory by putting unreasonable conditions. Also Khartoum started provoking the people of the South with air and ground attacks of innocent civilians inside the territories of the South along the border.

The real question is what can be expected from such summit with Khartoum consistently dishonouring agreement after agreement. One is not even sure of how much patience remains with Salva to continue negotiating with Bashir. Also this summit is being convened with Khartoum amassing and moving troops with heavy weapons along the border areas with the South. The recent air and ground attacks of the civilians in Raja County in Western Bahr el Ghazal state that resulted in killing of more than 32 civilians clearly showed the intention of Khartoum to put more pressure on Juba before the summit. It is a common belief in the South that the recent increase in the level of insecurity in the South is largely instigated by Khartoum with the aim of weakening the leadership of the South.

The summit is being convened when the two countries are experiencing serious economic and political challenges. In particular, the economy of Sudan is at the brink of collapse as shown by its 2013 budget. Despite the political rhetoric that the Sudanese economy is recovering with the oil production increasing to about 140,000 barrels per day and with increase in gold export, the Sudanese pound is severely suffering and may end up like Zairian currency during the rule of former president Mobutu Sese Seko. Although some circles in Khartoum seem to gamble to strangle the South by not allowing the export of its oil through Sudan, the experience of the last few months has proven to be suicidal.

Also Sudan is experiencing a real social unrest with increased demonstrations that may threaten the survival of the regime in Khartoum if the current economic hardship continues for the next few months. The Sudan Revolutionary Front seems to be gaining militarily. It is also succeeding politically by winning other traditional and democratic political forces to agree on a regime change through peaceful means. Diplomatically, Sudan is losing the Arab world with its clear choice to associate itself with Iran. Sudan may soon lose the support from most African countries in the next meeting of the AU Council if it continues to reject the African solutions on Abyei and border.

The South on the other hand, despite its successful austerity measures, is facing serious economic difficulties as its foreign reserves seem to be dwindling rapidly. Despite the successful austerity measures, increased level of agriculture production and signing of serious refinery construction agreements, the economic situation in the South may deteriorate further in the next few months. There is also increase social unrest and feeling of uneasiness among the citizens in the South over increased insecurity in most parts of the South, unjustifiable and cowardly assassination of Isaiah Abraham, and the unfolding pains of austerity measures. Diplomatically, the South has performed well in showing its seriousness in respecting the nine agreements.

Presidents Salva and Bashir will go to the summit and aware that the business will not be as usual as people of the two countries, particularly in Sudan, and international community have run out of patience. The summit is the last chance for the two leaders to agree on the way forward for implementing the nine agreements and on Abyei and border. President Bashir is fully aware that failure to agree on these pending issues in the next summit will force the heads of state of the AU Peace and Security Council not only to endorse the AUHIP proposals but it will forward these proposals to the UN Security Council for endorsement, a path that Khartoum wants to avoid.

Given the political and diplomatic consequences if the two heads of state failed to agree in the next summit, one expects that Bashir will be more reasonable to abandon his unjustifiable conditions of disengagement between the South and SPLM-North and the alleged harbouring of Sudanese rebels by the South so that the nine agreements to be fully implemented. In fact Sudan is so desperate for the oil revenue from the South.

On the five disputed border areas, there is almost agreement between the parties to resort to the international arbitration

after listening to the non-binding opinion from the AU border experts. The summit can easily resolve this issue and proceed to discuss the mechanisms for resolving the claimed border areas. While Sudan is asking for the claimed areas to be handled after finalization of arbitration over the disputed areas, Juba sees it appropriate to handle the disputed and claimed border areas simultaneously. One would expect this issue of the claimed border not to be a stumbling block as the summit could easily agree on a process of finalizing the identification of the claimed areas with facilitation of the AU border experts before these areas are taken for the international arbitration.

On Abyei area, the AUHIP Proposal on the final status of Abyei will be the basis of discussion in the next summit. President Bashir will try to push for further partitioning of Abyei area. One is not sure of how much patience remains with President Salva to renew negotiation over Abyei. However as the summit is a forum for negotiation, President Salva is expected to convince President Bashir to accept the AUHIP Abyei Proposal as a fair deal. It will be for the best interest of President Bashir to accept the AUHIP Abyei Proposal and to raise concerns, if necessary, that would constitute the basis for negotiating with President Salva.

One may expect that President Bashir not to be serious on unjustifiable option of further partitioning of Abyei but he may accept the AUHIP Abyei Proposal but with some reservations. These concerns are likely to be over eligibility of voters, the chair of Abyei Referendum Commission, timing of the referendum, the Abyei oil revenue sharing and political representation of Arab nomads in the administration of Abyei. President Salva is unlikely to renegotiate on the fundamental issues of eligibility, chair of the Commission and timing of the referendum but he may entertain new ideas on oil revenue sharing and political representation of Arab nomads in Abyei administration. If discussion over Abyei could focus on these two issues, then the summit could easily adopt the AUHIP Abyei Proposal with minor changes.

The worst scenario is that if President Bashir continues to be intransigent on the aforementioned issues, then this summit will be the last summit between Presidents Salva and Bashir. The next meeting of the AU Council will be decisive as it will either endorse what the summit agreed upon or to endorse the AUHIP proposals on the pending issues as final and binding African solutions. There will be a window of opportunity for Sudan to be given the last chance to accept these proposals before they are forwarded to the UN Security Council for endorsement and enforcement.

As the path of confrontation between the two countries or with the international community is suicidal and unwinnable, one expects the summit to reach agreement on the pending issues. President Bashir is fully aware that any further confrontation with the South and international community will not only shorten his life in power with misery but will leave a bad legacy that will haunt his family for generations to come. I am confident that the wisdom, imagination and the interests of the people will prevail in this summit so that the people of the two countries can enjoy again peace and stability.

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