

## Disintegration of the Sudanese State: the most likely scenario

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By Elwathig Kameir

February 10, 2013 - Successive political crises have been the hallmark of the interim period that followed the conclusion of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Sudan Government, represented by the National Congress Party (NCP), and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) in January 2005. Since the end of the interim period and the secession of the South, Sudan has been witnessing a tense political climate and a perpetual crisis(es) on an unprecedented scale. Now, there is sharp "vertical" polarization separating the government, on the one hand, and both the political and armed opposition, civil society organizations, and clusters of young citizens, on the other hand. As well, there are "horizontal" rifts and divisions within political parties. This includes the ruling party and the Islamic Movement (IM), (which, ironically, was responsible for bringing this very party to power), and the armed movements, the reported grumbling and restlessness within the military, with the escalation of tribal and ethnic loyalty feuds, and the rise of Jihadists and Muslim extremist groups. This acute political polarization is manifested in the raging armed conflict and escalating deterioration of the security situation in Darfur, the ongoing war in South Kordofan and the Blue Nile, the declining economy and rampant corruption, the strained relationship with the South, and with the looming specter of war between the two Sudans. In addition, there is the lingering issue of how to deal with the International Criminal Court (ICC).

The NCP, the sole ruling party, which has complete hegemony over power and control of state institutions, is primarily responsible for this predicament. By having failed in the faithful and honest implementation of the CPA provisions as the only guarantee for the transition to a genuine citizenship-state, the NCP fell short of maintaining the unity of the country through allaying the fears of the people of the South, the Nuba Mountains, Southern Blue Nile, and Darfur, of the perpetual dependence, marginalization, and deprivation of rights, and guaranteeing their freedom, equality, and justice.

This description depicts an unfolding reality that is clear and undeniable to observers. In consequence, the Sudanese in their social gatherings are left with little on which to mull over than this festering political crisis and the doom and gloom it portends in coming days. In light of these serious developments, one may contemplate three scenarios.

### The First Scenario: Maintaining the Status Quo

1.1 The ruling NCP may succeed in preserving the status quo by effecting minor and superficial window-dressing-type changes in some government faces, positions, and policies, in response both in response to incessant calls for reform and desire to appease the increasingly disgruntled membership and supporters of the ruling party and the IM. This scenario, however, is contingent on the ability of the NCP to hold on to power and hegemony over state institutions, as well as the capacity to win some political forces to its side. It shall also depend on its ability to maintain its complex tribal, ethnic, and religious patronage network, retain loyalty of the army and other regular forces and succeed in its unending efforts to infiltrate and divide the political and armed opposition groups. The NCP may, in addition, resort to its arsenal of tactics to drive a wedge between the two oppositions, while continuing its military campaign against the armed movements, capitalizing on the international community's keenness to avert the violent collapse of the state and the conflagration of a new war between Sudan and South Sudan. In this respect it shall be counting on the supportive position of China and Russia in the UN Security Council (UNSC). The ruling party might also acquiesce to some of the international community's pressures and demands, while taking advantage of the African Union's (AU) resolution regarding solidarity of most of the African countries with Sudan on the issue of the International Criminal Court (ICC). The NCP's ultimate objective seems to lie in dragging the political forces to the general elections scheduled for mid-2014 and make them face a de facto situation, which would further divide and weaken these forces. On the other hand, the leadership of the ruling party believes that the international community will support and commend the organization of elections.

1.2 However, many indications point to the difficulty, if not the impossibility of sustaining this situation. Participation in such elections, with the NCP in control of state power and institutions, while laws restricting freedoms are intact, makes this scenario a nonstarter for the opposition forces. Thus, maintaining the status quo is deemed to be a short-lived scenario, whatever time it takes. Even the ideologues of the ruling party admit that "one-party rule is unsustainable and that presence of the opposition in the political system represents a deterrent to tyranny, and provides an alternative to the government" (Amin Hassan Omer, Sudan TV, 10/01/2013).

1.3 Simply put, this scenario would by no means lead to democratic transformation nor would it constitute a safe exit from the deepening national crisis in the country.

1.4 The NCP, fractured as it is, cannot continue fighting in multiple fronts, which are increasing by the day. The deteriorating national economic situation and declining state revenues shall continue to constrain the party's capacity to sustain its extensive patronage network at the political, ethnic, tribal, military, and security levels. The regime also cannot continue

capitalizing on the international community's reluctance in supporting the opposition's declared objective of overthrowing the regime as the latter keeps shifting its goal posts in light of the rapidly changing political situation on the ground.

1.5 On the other hand, it seems as if the NCP is stubbornly determined to monopolize state power to the complete exclusion of the other political forces, by invoking the legitimacy of the constitutional arrangements premised on the CPA and the results of the general elections of April 2010. Indeed, some of the NCP front-line politicians (DrNafie Ali Nafie) have never been embarrassed to declare that they shall continue ruling the Sudan ad infinitum. Such utterances shall only make political and armed opposition groups entrenched in their position to overthrow the regime. The recently signed "New Dawn Charter", between the Sudan Revolutionary Forces (SRF) and National Consensus Forces (NCF), explains why both political and military oppositions are intent to resort to rate means to achieve this objective. This is a zero-sum game that will lead both parties to a point of no return, in which no party shall be a victor, thus may degenerate into:

#### The Second Scenario: The Disintegration of the State

2.1 This second scenario would see an armed insurgency, in the form of guerrilla warfare, aimed at exerting sustained pressures, combined with the efforts of peaceful opposition mounted by the rest of the Sudanese political forces, in order to topple the regime in Khartoum. Armed struggle, however, cannot achieve its purported objective of overthrowing the regime without political support from all forces that are intent on regime change, including Islamists of all hues. Regime overthrow presupposes, as our own experience in 1964 and 1985 demonstrated, a consensus of the Sudanese political forces. In both of these instances, the DUP and NUP blessed the popular uprisings, and "Islamists" Islamists" from across the spectrum were among the forces on the street that called for the downfall of the military regime, albeit at different stages in the process of the revolution. In 1995, at the time of the Asmara Declaration, almost all the Sudanese political forces were unequivocally united in the call for "uprooting" the regime through the convergence of military and political means of struggle. In contrast, some of these forces, divided and weak as they are, are currently either part of the government or are only half-heartedly supportive of radical change.

2.2 On the military front, while some opposition figures have decided to join the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF), it does not seem to have added much value or changed the image of the Front in the eyes of many people. The SRF is still perceived to be an exclusive forum for, and alliance of "marginalized nationalities", premised on ethnic and regional bases i.e. the "New South Syndrome", represented by armed insurgents. The Front has declared its commitment to the "convergence" of both civil and political action, and armed struggle", while calling upon all Sudanese political forces to join its ranks and "reject the path of partial political settlement with the NCP regime and adopt a holistic approach for changing the regime's seat of power in Khartoum". In the current political situation, however, there is a lack of both a) consensus on the objective of "overthrowing the regime", through armed insurgency, among the Sudanese political forces, and b) clarity regarding the SRF's approach for dealing with and engaging with these forces in light of the difference of opinion on methods of change. Notwithstanding the declared position of the SRF on its commitment to the "convergence" of both civil and political action, and armed struggle, since the days of the NDA, however, this convergence has remained a mere slogan and an elusive objective that lacks a realistic methodology or mechanism of implementation on the ground. The SRF has not unveiled any clear strategy in this respect.

2.3 Thus, except for sweeping statements made by the armed movements about the necessity of engaging with the opposition political forces, no concrete modalities to achieve that end had been presented to-date, save for a hurriedly signed "New Dawn" charter, between the SRF and the National Consensus Forces (NCF). Although that charter marks a progressive step towards the creation of a common political platform for the opposition, it falls short of providing the needed political support to armed insurgency, akin to that rendered by the political forces to the SPLA and other armed resistance groups in the 1990s. Namely, that support was characterized by: a) reaching a consensus on the mechanisms of overthrowing the regime, b) defining the process through which power will be handed to the forces signatory to the charter, and c) setting up an organizational structure, necessary for the follow up on the implementation of the charter. Furthermore, immediately following the ceremony of signing the charter, the NCF Secretariat and the individual constituent parties publically declared their reservation and/or objection to some of the charter's substantive resolutions and points, calling for a comprehensive review and scrutiny of the document. These include: the relation between religion and the state, the proposed governance structures, and the replacement of SAF by a new army. Indeed, it took the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) many years to convene the Asmara historical conference on Sudan's fundamental issues and to agree on an organizational structure.

2.4 It is, therefore, evident that the vaguely defined objective of regime overthrow in a situation of war and armed conflict, with neither a consensus nor a common vision, is a precursor for dismantling the country. Sudan lacks a single, cohesive, and legitimate institution, perhaps with the exception of SAF, which could oversee a peaceful transition of power. Notwithstanding the INF/NCP's incessant attempts to politically infiltrate its ranks and obliterate its national identity, SAF still maintained its national character. Indeed, the instrumental role played by the army in the two popular uprisings of 1964 and 1985 cannot be overlooked or underestimated. Perhaps, the two officially declared two coup attempts of the past few months have demonstrated that the army, contrary to the belief of some quarters, is still sensitive and responsive to calls for political reform, even if they come from the Islamists themselves, which includes promotion of democracy, radical reforms in the structure of the political system, redefining the relation between the ruling party the state institutions, combating and eradication of corruption, and the participation of all political forces in a transparent and consensual constitution-making process, a process leading to the organization of free and fair elections.

2.5 While few can question the legitimacy of rebellion against injustice and marginalization by the aggrieved groups, war is not just a mere act of bravado. It is also a costly and destructive operation. If the purpose of war is to weaken the army through incessant confrontations, with the armed insurgents in South Kordofan, Blue Nile, and Darfur, that may end in

making Sudan or what has remained of it come unhinged. Equally, attempts to encroach on the army's authority by security forces and other parallel militias, shall in both cases result in confrontations. Such acts would eventually lead to the collapse of the central government authority by limiting its capacity to impose order, resulting in the loss of physical control of territory, and/or monopoly over the legitimate use of force, making it no longer capable of reproducing the conditions for its own existence.

2.6 In other words, Sudan's weak institutional setup and fragile state institutions, its complex political configuration, the absence of a unified counterweight to the NCP dominance at the centre, the lack of unity of cause and methods between the political forces, and an unfolding political polarization between the various contenders for power render the line between regime overthrow, ill defined as it may be, and the violent collapse of the state itself, a very thin one. Thus, under these circumstances, regime fall, and the resultant power vacuum, could trigger a wild scramble for power by the multiple armed actors, including the security forces, Popular Defense Forces (PDFs), and other parallel ethnic and tribal militias affiliated with the regime, for control of Khartoum, and other parts of the country, a process that would be near impossible to restrain or reverse. Neighboring countries suffering from internal problems, some of which have expansionist ambitions and historical claims to Sudanese territories, would find it opportune to intervene and occupy the areas that fall within their reach, or else ally with some of the internal power contenders to serve their own respective agenda. Iran and other Islamist governments in the region would also likely lend their support to the rescue of the regime.

2.7 This seems to be the scenario with highest probability of materializing, particularly in light of the economic, social and demographic developments that have occurred in the country during the previous two. These developments have resulted in unprecedented migration and displacement to the national capital, leading to the emergence of two divergent societies, that of the rich who own everything, and the poor who own nothing. Furthermore, the continuous erosion of the middle class, which augurs a severe schism that could trigger an already inflamed public anger that may turn into civil unrest and a generalized chaos. Injustices embodied in the relation between the centre and the "marginalized" areas should not distract us from the economic and social injustices in the center itself, which threatens to destroy the social peace.

### The Third Scenario: A Comprehensive Political Settlement

3.1 The only scenario that shall save the country from sliding into chaos, forestall violent collapse of the state, and ensure the country's territorial integrity, presuppose a process of peaceful democratic transition whereby a consensus is reached on a genuine program for change by all political forces, including the NCP, and other forces of change (youth and women), without exclusion or omission. This program is to lead to the transition of Sudan from the dominance of one party to political pluralism in a Sudanese citizenship-state. This transformation was provided for in the CPA, but sadly the two partners to the Agreement, in particular the NCP, and the rest of the political forces, have failed to realize during the interim period.

3.2 The million dollar question is how to effect this peaceful transition and comprehensive political settlement? Though this is the most preferable scenario for most of the political forces and a wide spectrum of Sudanese, including the armed movements, some of the opposition forces and many skeptics strongly believe that the regime should be overthrown. That viewpoint is based on the belief that it cannot be improved, and therefore has to be removed, a precondition for any genuine reform attempt. In the eyes of these groups the democratic transformation can by no means be achieved while the NCP monopolizes power and controls state institutions. I have to admit, however, that the success of this scenario is contingent on the ability of the ruling party to change its policies and attitudes either as a result of the internal dynamics within its ranks or in response to external pressures. The regime in Khartoum is already under pressure on political, economic, and multiple military fronts. It is also increasingly concerned about the prospects of an Arab Spring-like uprising, a possibility that is no longer being denied by key figures in the ruling party, particularly in view of the mounting economic crisis. Thus, the NCP is subjected to increasing pressures from its own grassroots membership and from within the ranks of the Islamic Movement, as well as from the opposition political forces and from the members of the regional and international community.

3.3 Therefore, a peaceful transition would only be realized if the NCP acknowledges the gravity of the national crisis and that it is impossible for it, in light of the observed polarization and festering political climate, to fully address the daunting challenges of Sudan, particularly following the separation of the South, either on its own or in conjunction with its allies. The NCP must recognize the rest of the political and civil forces of Sudan and the rise of new powers in areas of armed conflict (Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan), their respective constituencies and social bases, their role in prospective change, and the imperative of their participation in finding solutions to our national problems.

3.4 Following the ICC's indictment of President Elbashir on 14 July 2008 (before the issuance of the arrest warrant in March 2009), I wrote a series of articles entitled "A Shot in the Dark" published (in Arabic) in a number of Sudanese daily papers (Alray-aam, Alsaahafa, Alahdath) and websites (Sudanile, Sudan Tribune, New Sudan Vision, Sudaneseonline) in October 2008. The main thesis of these articles was that, "if the ICC's indictment of the President reached its logical conclusion, it would trigger and ignite the fuse of intense power struggle, even amongst competing factions inside the ruling party. In light of the many forces aspiring to power, the multiplicity of armed groups, the raging conflict in Darfur, the lurking regional and international powers, and the absence of consensual successor to the president, the door is wide open to the collapse of the Sudanese state. Undoubtedly, the repercussions of ICC's decision against the head of the state, whatever we think about his person or party, will jeopardize any opportunity for a peaceful transition to democratic polity and exposes the country to an uncertain future, leading it to slip into the abyss of chaos and devastating civil war. Contrary to the skeptics' contention that

the ruling of the ICC will usher Sudan into a brighter future with more and easier prospects for peace, we should first ensure the cohesion and unity of the country before predicting its future" (Alahdath, 20/10/2008, p. 6).

3.5 Against this backdrop, and given the massive and unprecedented support extended to Sudan, internally, regionally, and internationally, in the face of the ICC's decision, I proposed backing Elbashir's candidacy to the presidency by all the political forces on basis of a consensual program that places the "nation above the party". This program would serve as the elections manifesto of the president, whose ultimate and main objective is to let him complete the interim period's overarching task of a peaceful transition to democracy and political pluralism. Nonetheless, I noted that the agreement on this arrangement had absolutely nothing to do with the electoral alliances of political forces, which would freely compete on the basis of party platforms to win seats in the legislature.

3.6 I proposed that the consent of the political forces to back up the president in the elections should, however, be reciprocated on the part of the president by taking a package of decisive measures, namely; a) the reconstitution of the "Government of National Unity" by accommodating the political forces that have the political weight and popular social bases, and b) the political agreement on a national program that would bring all the political forces together with the ruling partners with the objective of preparing the ground for fair and free elections, monitoring and overseeing the implementation of the remaining prerequisites of democratic transformation, while reaching a just political settlement of the conflict in Darfur, as the only correct and viable approach for addressing the roots of our national crisis. Commitment to this program would garner the support of the regional and international community, thus resolving the confrontation with the ICC. My proposal was premised on the following factors:

i. It must be recognized that the issue of international justice is not purely a legal matter, but is rather susceptible to political justifications and motivations, and that's exactly what has prompted the signatories to the Rome Statute of the ICC to introduce article (16), which gives the right to the UNSC to stop the prosecution proceedings or freeze the trial for a year subject to renewal, if the Court decisions contradicted with the requirements of achieving peace and stability. It needs not be emphasized that the UNSC functions on the basis of the member countries' political agenda to safeguard international peace and security. Indeed, the United Nations is, in essence, a worldwide political congregation.

ii. The issue of criminal justice and the investigation of human rights violations and war crimes was not overlooked by the CPA negotiations agenda, but the parties to the conflict subscribed to the prioritization of peace and stability, while addressing the question of justice within the broader framework of national reconciliation and healing in the context of the CPA implementation, and on the basis of any prospective resolution of the conflict in Darfur.

iii. On the other hand, the "legal rights" activists believe in the primacy, and the necessity of achieving justice without due consideration to the resulting dire consequences and chaos. Had this been the case, however, the SPLM would have strongly insisted on the application of justice first before agreeing to stop a protracted war, during which grave atrocities were committed and rights of innocents were violated, and John Garang would not have shaken hands with Albashir. Indeed, the SPLM lent its support to the president following his indictment by the ICC, and Salva Kiir, Garang's successor and First Vice President, chaired a high-level committee formed by the president to address the crisis precipitated by the court's ruling. Malik Agar, Deputy Chairman of the SPLM and Governor of the Blue Nile, at the inauguration ceremony of the Roseiris Dam expansion's project, on 14 August 2008, described the indictment as "sheer babbling" on the part of Luis Ocampo, the prosecutor of the ICC, and underscored his standing behind the president.

iv. Even after the aggravation of the armed conflict in Darfur and the deterioration of humanitarian conditions, with all attendant international media amplification that outmatched the media coverage of the war in the South, which was arguably more devastating, criminal justice was incorporated in the agenda of the opposition political forces only after the ICC's indictment of the president. The attention had instead been focused on how to peacefully resolve the conflict and reach a just and lasting political settlement.

v. The credibility of the ICC has remained a controversial issue on which political parties and civil society organizations have divergent views even amongst the member countries in Western Europe and the United States. Most of the third world countries, particularly in Africa, even among signatories to the Rome Statute, question the fairness of the Court due to selectivity, double standards, and submission to political motives. Thus, the overwhelming majority of African states and members of the Arab League lined up firmly behind Bashir in condemning the indictment. On 3 July 2009, the AU resolved not to cooperate with the ICC and requested the UN Security Council to defer the process initiated by the Court in accordance with the provisions of Article 16 of the Rome Statute. However, it must be underscored that the activation of the deferral process, in turn, calls for instituting judicial reforms and transitional justice mechanisms leading to reconciliation and a culture of accountability, and implementing legal and judicial measures to end impunity in all the areas of conflict.

#### The Ball is in the President's Court

1. Four years after the publication of my article (October 2008), the International Crisis Group (ICG) brought my thesis back to life in its latest report on Sudan entitled "Major Reform Or More War?", published on 29 November 2012. The report underscores the reality that chronic conflict, driven by the concentration of power and resources in the centre, continues to plague the country. Thus, the regime in Khartoum is in crisis, faced with multiple challenges that, combined, profoundly threaten its existence and Sudan's stability. Though many hope a coup, or popular uprising, could force Bashir and the NCP regime out, there is a great risk that either event could trigger even more violence. According to the ICG, the solution lies in the emergence of a credible and a more inclusive transitional government, with the NCP on board. This would in turn lead to a meaningful national dialogue on a new constitution, and a roadmap for permanent change in how Sudan is governed. If concrete moves towards a credible transition process are undertaken, a Security Council request to the ICC to defer the

prosecution of Bashir for one year under Article 16 of the Rome Statute. There would be no obligation to renew such deferrals if Bashir reneges on his transition commitments.

2. Of course, a lot of water has passed under the bridge during these four years, in terms of new developments and variables that have cropped up in the meantime. These include; the separation of the South, the eruption of war in South Kordofan and the Blue Nile, the escalation of violence in Darfur, the growing tension with South Sudan, and the observed friction and struggle over power within the ruling party itself. The question, therefore, is: are the ideas presented in my proposal still relevant and viable? Or have these new variables rendered them irrelevant and unfeasible?

3. On my part, I am inclined to think that these new developments make my proposal even more pertinent than it was four years ago. The historical evolution of the "Inqaz" regime has proven that the president is the only person who entertains the approval and acceptance of all the factions in the NCP, and its affiliated Islamic Movement (IM). Despite understanding that the president is the only one who is capable of keeping the party and the IM together, there are some who consider him more of a liability, in particular following the ICC arrest warrant. However, the names floated around as an alternative do not seem to have enough of a base in the party or the military to really rally people around one of them. Thus, the president remains to be the symbol of the army and its Supreme Commander. He also wields the reigns of power and fully controls the process of the internal power struggle between the NCP's competing factions. This was demonstrated by the observed power struggle between these factions, which came to surface in the wake of the official announcement of the president's health condition and surgical operations he underwent during the last quarter of last year. Moreover, in addition to being at the helm of the ruling party, the president has now become chairman of the High Leading Bureau of the IM.

4. In this capacity, the president must remove the narrow robes of the party and drape himself in the wider cloak of the entire Sudan. This must be done through the adoption of a program that responds not only to the wishes of his electorate, but goes beyond it to meet the expectations of the other political forces, which, in essence represent legitimate constitutional demands based on agreements with these same forces. As such, the president should satisfy his citizens from across political shades, and preserve the gains of the Sudanese people and their aspiration to a permanent peace and secure livelihood. In fact, the president himself, in his address to the Sudanese people, in the wake of his victory in the elections, stressed that "our thanks on this day include all those who stood with us and supported us from the sectors of all Sudanese people, and also include those who did not, whose choice of not supporting us will in no way devalue their citizenship. The President of the Republic exercises his constitutional powers as a president for all and he is responsible for all citizens. This is a fact I confirm and a commitment I declare. Our hands and our minds are open to all forces operating in the framework of the Constitution, to communicate and engage in dialogue and consultation to institute a national partnership with which we can meet the challenges". In turn, this presidential assurance of responding to the aspirations of all citizens requires taking the necessary practical steps for translating his words into actions.

5. Following the conclusion of the CPA, the president was no longer only the President of the Republic, running an ordinary presidential term, or simply the leader of the ruling party. Similarly, he is not merely the head of "Inqaz" regime, but he is the primary figure responsible for the most critical and important political transition and constitutional transformation since the country's independence in 1956. The president is the main guarantor of the integrity of the constitutional arrangements based on the CPA. Accordingly, he is primarily responsible for removing the specter of partition and fragmentation of the country and the preservation of the integrity of what has remained from the old Sudan. Many, mistakenly, believe that the CPA only signifies an end to the war between north and south, while overlooking that the Agreement has two twin objectives: ending the war and achieving peace and democratic transformation. While it is true that the interim period officially came to an end following the independence of South Sudan, a number of important outstanding and post-secession issues are still under negotiations. Thus, provisions of both the CPA and the Cairo Agreement, between the NCP and the NDA, regarding democratic transformation are yet to be implemented. With this understanding, the CPA outstanding issues are not only confined to the conflict in the three transitional areas (South Kordofan, the Blue Nile, and Abyei). Rather, the transition to democracy is in itself an outstanding CPA issue.

6. Therefore, President Elbashir still has the golden opportunity to play a historic role, which would turn him into a national hero and political leader, by shedding partisan allegiances and putting the "nation above the party", thus leading a process of national consensus on a national program that would respond to the daunting challenges of the unfolding national crisis, and on the mechanisms of its implementation. The president has the constitutional powers to develop a package of the required measures that would avert the degeneration of the crisis into the second scenario. These measures include:

- i. Devote the remaining period of his term in office to lead a process of completing the unfinished tasks in the implementation of the CPA and embodied in the Interim National Constitution, with the objective of ensuring a peaceful transition to multi-party democracy.
- ii. Initiate and embark on a direct, frank, and serious dialogue with all the political forces in the opposition in order to reach a national consensus and political agreement on the basic elements of a national program.
- iii. Broaden the governance base by forming a genuinely participatory government comprising the forces that have political weight and a popular base of support to implement the national consensus program.
- iv. Determine the priorities of the government's program, primarily; resolving the CPA outstanding and post-secession issues, and completing the remaining requirements of democratic transformation, through the implementation of all related provisions of the CPA, and the Cairo agreement. This includes, resolving the Abyei issue in a manner that would preserve the region as a bridge between north and south and establish it as a model for peaceful coexistence, ending the war and armed conflict in Darfur, South Kordofan, and the Blue Nile, by following a comprehensive approach that transcends partial solutions

- in order to achieve justice and lasting peace, and establishing the principles of accountability for the commission of serious crimes and violations of international human rights laws and conventions, transparency, and transitional justice.
- v. Commence the formulation of mechanisms and means for comprehensive national reconciliation and healing throughout the country, particularly in the war-affected areas.
  - vi. Organize a comprehensive, consensual, transparent, and inclusive constitutional review process, regardless of the form it takes, with the broad participation of all political and civil forces. This review process aims at addressing, and reaching consensus on all the national controversial issues.
  - vii. Prepare the ground for, and reach a consensus with all the contending political forces on the necessary conditions and legislations for holding free and fair elections to the satisfaction of these forces. This, in turn calls for lifting imposed restrictions on political and civil rights by amending all laws, regulations, and forming a credible body for organizing and supervising the elections.
7. Equally, the SRF and the opposition political parties would need to do to show the NCP and the general public that they are serious about engaging in a broad dialogue with all political parties and civil society and to participate in a broad-based government. Many Sudanese, even among the educated and more liberal-minded populace, do not see how these forces can help moving the situation forward, if there is a real opportunity for national dialogue leading to a managed transition. The "New Dawn" charter gives priority to civil and democratic means of change. However, the SRF/NCF are obliged to embark on publically recognizable efforts to get the message out to the Sudanese people that they are primarily for peaceful change and a comprehensive political settlement. Such efforts would boost the process of national consensus, and may include: a) create a formal committee entrusted with the task of engaging with the NCP on this, b) unilaterally initiate a public information campaign all over the country to get any messages out about their willingness to go forward with the proposed settlement, and c) undertake an initiative aimed in particular at youth-youth dialogue across the parties, given how contentious and violent university student politics have become. .
8. I am aware that my thesis shall raise many eye brows and may and may have an unpalatable taste to, if not a hard pill to swallow by, some parties. Nonetheless, I submit that it is the only agendum that may realize peaceful resolution of the simmering national crisis, head off the collapse of the Sudanese state, and forestall the specter of foreign-imposed solutions. Equally, I need not emphasize that what I am proposing is contingent on the president, as well as the NCP, recognizing that the scale and magnitude of the Sudanese crisis and the dangers threatening the existence of the state are far greater than what they had experienced before. The challenges currently facing the country are too enormous for any single entity to successfully address, thus rendering the resort to mundane approaches and prescriptions a futile exercise.

#### Conclusion

1. Ironically, while Sudan is celebrating its 57th anniversary of independence from colonial rule, the country is now divided in virtually all respects, both vertically and horizontally. Coupled with the fragility of state institutions, this predicament constitutes a perfect recipe for the disintegration of the State. The country lacks a clear inspiring future vision and a perceptive and consensual leadership, two critical factors for reigning in widespread armed conflict, deepening political fractures, resurgence of ethnicity and tribalism, thus gluing the country together and averts its breakup. It happened in Somalia, among other instances, and could possibly happen in Sudan. Indeed, even ethnic, linguistic and religious homogeneity did not save Somalia from disintegration and state failure. The conventional wisdom that the Sudanese are immune from such a horrible scenario by virtue of their unique social milieu, values, and culture, will not hold water. Violent and unrestrained power struggle could not be circumvented by socio-cultural heritage without, at least, a semblance of a united political platform for the major political forces, and unless sense and wisdom dawns on its leadership and the Sudanese political class at large. Indeed, no peaceful transition has ever been achieved in any country in the world in the absence of wise and perceptive leadership.
  2. It is maintained that, regime overthrow and political change this time cannot take the conventional form of power transfer and a managed transition, through the national army, similar to our experience in 1964 and 1985 or to that of Tunisia and Egypt in 2011. Of course, this does not rule out a popular uprising, albeit in a different form and with high human and material cost. In this particular critical juncture in the history of the country, however, the president has the historical opportunity to take bold decisions for saving the country from sliding into an abyss, thus turning himself into a national hero and restore to the NCP lost credibility. Though the South separated during the reign of the president, history might find him an excuse since secession responded to the popular aspirations of Southerners in a transparent and fair process and by an overwhelming vote in the self-determination referendum. However, if the second scenario were to take its course, it would be recorded in history that Sudan fragmented into pieces under the leadership and auspices of president Elbashir, or he was the one who had sowed the seeds of this fatality.
- Finally, it is imperative to note that the purpose of drawing these scenarios, in particular the third scenario, is not to provide undisputable prescriptions for political change. Rather, the exercise aims at helping to transcend the current impasse in the debate on the political situation by provoking discussion and enriching dialogue on the realistic and practical ways of realizing a peaceful transition and a comprehensive political settlement. The ruling party, the political opposition, and the armed movements, have all repeatedly made sweeping and generalized statements indicating their preference for a political solution. However, to lend credibility to these statements, these forces are obliged to articulate concrete proposals to answer

the million dollar question: how to achieve a peaceful transition? My contribution is just one attempt towards answering this question.

*Dr. Elwathig Kameir is a former university professor of Sociology and consultant with numerous regional and international organizations. He is also a former member of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and was known for his close relation with its late chairman John Garang de Mabior. He is reachable at kameir@yahoo.com.*