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Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes in
Africa



MEDIA MONITORING

31 AUGUST 2015

DRC

ICC trial of Congolese 'Terminator' warlord to start

NEWS STORY

Source: AFP

By Jan Hennop

30 August 2015 - Former Congolese warlord Bosco Ntaganda, nicknamed "The Terminator", goes on trial before the International Criminal Court Wednesday, accused of war crimes including the rape of child soldiers by his own rebel army.

The once-feared rebel commander with a flair for pencil moustaches, cowboy hats and fine dining, faces 13 counts of war crimes and five of crimes against humanity. He has pleaded not guilty.

Presiding Judge Robert Fremr will open proceedings against Rwandan-born Ntaganda at 0730 GMT at the court's Hague-based headquarters.

ICC's chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda will speak first, followed by Ntaganda's lawyers and those representing some 2,149 victims in the case.

Prosecutors say Ntaganda played a central role in ethnic attacks on civilians in the mineral-rich but restive northeastern Congolese province of Ituri in 2002-3, in a conflict rights groups believe has left some 60,000 dead since 1999.

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At a hearing a year ago to confirm charges against Ntaganda, chief prosecutor Bensouda accused the former warlord of allowing his fighters to rape child and woman soldiers in his own rebel army, or keep them as sex slaves.

One female child soldier received 150 lashes and was raped as punishment, with her wounds taking a month to heal, Bensouda said.

"This case is highly significant because for the first time in international criminal law, the ICC has charged a commander with acts of rape and sexual slavery committed against children within his own militia group and under his command," Brigid Inder of the Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice said in a statement.

- Feared warlord -

Ntaganda, 41, was once one of the most-wanted fugitives in Africa's Great Lakes region until he unexpectedly walked into the US embassy in the Rwandan capital Kigali in March 2013 and asked to be sent to The Hague.

He was the founder of the M23 rebel group that was defeated by the Congolese government in late 2013 after an 18-month insurgency in the vast Democratic Republic of Congo's North Kivu region.

Observers say Ntaganda was most likely fearing for his life as a fugitive from a rival faction within M23, but his motives for surrendering to the ICC remain unclear.

The court issued two arrest warrants against Ntaganda -- the first in 2006 and the second with additional charges in 2012.

The Rwandan-born Ntaganda is accused on account of his role in attacks on a number of Ituri towns over a year starting in September 2002.

Prosecutors accuse Ntaganda of leading a November 2002 attack on the gold mining town of Mongbwalu that lasted six days and left 200 villagers dead.

The ex-warlord personally stands accused of murdering a priest during the attack, whom he allegedly shot several times in the head with a revolver.

He had managed to evade arrest after the tribunal's first warrant was issued mainly because he remained a powerful commander.

His former FPLC commander Thomas Lubanga was sentenced to 14 years in jail in 2012 on charges of using child soldiers, one of only two convictions by the court since it was set up 11 years ago.

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UN and other experts accuse Kigali of being Ntaganda's master and pulling the strings in the M23, an allegation Rwanda has consistently denied.

Born in 1973, Ntaganda is one of at least a dozen Africans who have been in the ICC's custody and the court has been criticised for apparently only targeting leaders from the continent. His trial will last several months.

DR Congo probes rape charges against its C.Africa peacekeepers

NEWS STORY

Source: AFP

Kinshasa, 28 August 2015 - A team of military investigators from the Democratic Republic of Congo were probing charges of rape against three of their soldiers serving as UN peacekeepers in neighbouring Central African Republic, military sources said Friday.

The investigators arrived in Bangui, the Central African capital, on Thursday and were to head to the northeastern town of Bambari where the rapes allegedly took place, said a senior Congolese military source.

According to the source, the latest development suggests that a family member of the girls fabricated the rape allegations.

The military official said that a briefing by a leader of the UN's Central African Republic peacekeeping force MINUSCA, "confirms our theory that the lie was fabricated by the uncle of the girls who were allegedly raped".

The soldiers are alleged to have raped three women and girls, aged 18, 19 and 15. The victims' families notified the mission on August 12.

On August 20, the Congolese Justice Minister Alexis Thambwe told AFP that he had given orders to the auditor general of the army to prosecute the three men.

But according to the senior Congolese military official, the case folder is "empty", because of the "lies" orchestrated by an "uncle" of the three young girls, who has since contradicted his claims.

MINUSCA, which counts about 12,000 UN peacekeepers, faces at least 61 claims of misconduct, 12 of which involve sex abuse.

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A UN notice to the DR Congo dated August 18 said the most recent allegations were the fourth of their kind against Kinshasa's contingent. The UN also warned DR Congo could face sanctions if further incidents came to light.

BURUNDI

Team of International Envoys and Representatives on the Great Lakes of Africa Statement on Burundi

NEWS STORY

Source: http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2015/150828_02_en.htm

28 August 2015 - Deeply concerned by the worsening political, economic, and security situation in Burundi, the Envoys, following their meeting today in Geneva, call for the immediate resumption of an inclusive dialogue, including those parties which did not participate in recent elections, led by the East African Community with the support of the African Union and the United Nations.

Such a dialogue should be based on and respect the principles of the Arusha Agreement, which, signed fifteen years ago today, has led to more than a decade of peace and stability in Burundi.

The Envoys call on all Burundian stakeholders to reject violence and choose a peaceful path of dialogue to resolve fundamental sources of tension and conflict in the country.

The Team of International Special Envoys includes the Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General to the Great Lakes Region Said Djinnit, African Union Special Envoy Ibrahima Fall, U.S. Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region of Africa Thomas Perriello, European Union Senior Coordinator for the Great Lakes Region Koen Vervaeke, and Belgian Special Envoy for the African Great Lakes Region Frank De Coninck.

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Ban urges all parties in Burundi to ‘look beyond political differences,’ revive spirit of landmark peace accord

NEWS STORY

Source: UN News Centre

28 August 2015 - Fifteen years after the signing of a landmark Burundi peace accord, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today called on all the country’s political leaders, including those in exile, to find common cause and commit to build on the stability that was ushered in by the Arusha Agreement.

“Today, Burundi marks the fifteenth anniversary of the initial signing of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in Tanzania. This process gave birth to the first generation of Burundians with no direct experience of war since independence, said Mr. Ban in a statement issued by his spokesperson.

“Never has the spirit of Arusha been as sorely tested as in the past five months,” the statement continued, with the Secretary-General encouraging the Burundian people to reconnect with the spirit of dialogue, consensus, democracy and peaceful resolution of disputes embodied by the Arusha Agreement.

Just last week, the UN chief, noting the inauguration of Pierre Nkurunziza for his third term as President of Burundi, urged him to “pursue a path of inclusivity and reconciliation,” and reiterated his call on all Burundian stakeholders to undertake a broad and transparent political dialogue.

In the statement issued today, Mr. Ban called on all leaders from across the political spectrum to show the courage and vision to resume dialogue with their rivals and look beyond their political differences.

“No matter how great these differences may seem, they are smaller than the price of returning to violence,” he declared.

The Secretary-General recalled that a month after the signing of the Arusha Agreement, the Facilitator of the Burundi peace process, the late President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, told the UN Security Council: “Burundi stands at the threshold of a completely new chapter in its history. That history will judge very harshly those that deliberately choose to obstruct the road to peace and progress.”

Echoing that message, Mr. Ban expressed the hope that all Burundian political leaders, including those in exile, could find common ground and demonstrate their commitment to consolidate peace and stability that the Arusha Agreement brought the country.

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Burundi has been in the grips of a political crisis since late April, when Mr. Nkurunziza was put on the ballot for a controversial third term. Tensions intensified when he won the July 21 election. More than 100,000 people have fled to neighbouring countries in the weeks ahead of and following the polls.

Tensions remain high – just two weeks ago, the UN human rights office warned that the situation is spiralling out of control amid a spate of deadly election related violence – and Mr. Ban has repeatedly appealed for an end to politically – motivated violence and urged all Burundians to peacefully settle their differences without delay.

During a phone call with Mr. Nkurunziza on 6 August, the Secretary-General urged him to resume the political dialogue, which had been suspended since 19 July. He also encouraged the Burundian authorities to work closely with the Ugandan-led facilitation on behalf of the East African Community.

Burundi president gives two months to dismantle armed groups

NEWS STORY

Source: Xinhua

Bujumbura, 30 August 2015 - Burundian President Pierre Nkurunziza has given defense and security forces two months for to dismantle armed groups committing selective killings especially in the capital Bujumbura.

"Security committees are invited to work day and night to dismantle, within two months, small groups that commit selective killings and that cause panicking within citizens, especially in Bujumbura city," Nkurunziza said while announcing his five-year plan.

He indicated that joint security committees made up by citizens, security forces, the administration and justice officials will be trained in order to improve the level of collaboration.

"We will counter any action that would disturb security—whether internal or external.

"That is why we call on security and defense forces to be more watchful than ever before so that no enemy escapes them," said Nkurunziza.

He indicated that compulsory civic service is to be back for young people, especially university students.

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He added that the disarmament of civilians will continue and means will be given to security forces to participate in international peacekeeping missions.

"Civic education will continue to be provided in an effort to convince citizens to make a front to safeguard peace and security in villages or neighborhoods," Nkurunziza added.

During the next five years, the east African country's president said his program will focus on peace building, justice and security, strengthening of good governance based on democracy and integral and sustainable development.

Nkurunziza was elected for a third term on July 21 in a controversial presidential poll boycotted by the opposition who claimed that the climate was not favorable for fair, credible and inclusive elections.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

C.Africa to limit president to two terms under new charter

NEWS STORY

Source: AFP

30 August 2015 - Central African Republic's transitional government on Sunday adopted a new constitution that would limit future presidents to two terms in office as the country seeks to end more than a year of sectarian violence.

The new charter would limit the president's mandate to five years that can only be renewed once and cannot be prolonged for any reason, and would create a new senate to help govern.

The constitution, which will now be put to a public vote, also includes the creation of a special court to judge the most serious crimes.

"I urge the Central African people, when the time comes, to give strong backing to this new fundamental law to allow our country to get back on the path to a normal constitutional order," said Alexandre-Ferdinand Nguendet, chairman of the National Transitional Council.

The Central African Republic descended into bloodshed after a 2013 coup against longtime leader Francois Bozize unleashed a wave of violence, pitting Christian anti-Balaka militias against mostly Muslim Seleka rebels.

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Its transitional leaders have planned a constitutional referendum before the presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for October 18.

But the elections have already been delayed twice due to the logistical and security challenges of holding the vote in regions still gripped by violence.

In the latest incident, at least 20 people were killed last week and many others injured in days of sectarian clashes sparked by the death of a young Muslim, police sources said.

CAR court bars transitional govt members from polls

NEWS STORY

Source: Reuters

30 August 2015 - Central African Republic's constitutional court has confirmed the exclusion of past members of a transitional government from running for office in presidential and parliamentary elections due in October.

A 2013 transitional charter stated that members of the caretaker body would not be eligible to participate in the polls, which are meant to draw a line under more than two years of violence.

However, the court was asked to clarify the charter's provision after former Prime Minister Nicolas Tiangaye and other senior ministers, who have since left the transitional government, announced their candidacies.

The country descended into chaos in March 2013 when predominantly Muslim Seleka rebels seized power, triggering reprisals by "anti-balaka" Christian militias who drove tens of thousands of Muslims from the south in a de facto partition.

The transitional authority was established to lead the country to fresh elections.

According to the court decision made public on Saturday, anyone serving in the transitional authority is ineligible "regardless of the length of time he filled his functions... and whatever the causes for stopping these functions".

Tiangaye stepped down as prime minister along with President Michel Djotodia, a Seleka leader, in January 2014 over the government's inability to halt the inter-religious violence.

Crepin Mboli Ngumba, a former minister of state and spokesperson for the transitional authority, denounced the court decision as "fanciful".

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"This decision, without a doubt, creates more problems," he said. "Those who lit the fuse of this bomb will have to answer for it."

Central African Republic's presidential and legislative elections are scheduled for October 18. However, they have already been postponed several times and preparations for the polls are running behind schedule.

U.N. Official to Visit Central African Republic amid Scrutiny over Peacekeepers

NEWS STORY

Source: New York Times

By Somini Sengupta

28 August 2015 - The way the United Nations has handled sexual abuse allegations against peacekeepers in the Central African Republic has come under sharp scrutiny, including on the high commissioner for human rights, Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein.

His office said on Friday that Mr. al-Hussein would make a three-day visit to the republic next week to meet with commanders and the new acting leader of the peacekeeping mission. "He will also review efforts to prevent human rights abuses and to ensure immediate and effective action whenever such abuses are committed by international forces," his office said in a statement.

The peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic has been roiled by a series of sexual abuse allegations, including some involving children. The problems allegedly started before the United Nations mission was formally established there about a year ago: French troops who were sent to Bangui, the capital, to protect civilians have been accused of sexually abusing boys over a period of six months beginning in December 2013.

Mr. al-Hussain's office uncovered those allegations. A report about the accusations was leaked to French diplomats, and Mr. al-Hussain suspended a staff member who was responsible for the leak, prompting complaints that Mr. al-Hussain had mishandled the inquiry.

The staff member, Anders Kompass, has since been reinstated, and the United Nations secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, has appointed an independent panel to review how the organization as a whole handled the matter. The panel's report is due later this year.

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For his part, Mr. al-Husseini criticized France for what he called delays in investigating its own troops. France has said that it began its inquiry promptly, but it has yet to announce any charges.

The problems seem to extend far beyond the French military contingent. The United Nations has said that since the peacekeeping mission was established, it has received 13 separate reports of sex abuse and rape allegations in the Central African Republic involving soldiers and police officers from Burundi, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Morocco.

The scandal has been so damaging to the United Nations' reputation that Mr. Ban took the rare step of dismissing the head of the peacekeeping mission, Babacar Gaye, a Senegalese former general, and sending Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, a seasoned mediator from Gabon, to replace him on an acting basis.

Mr. al-Husseini served in a United Nations peacekeeping force himself, during the 1990s wars in the Balkans, and then became a diplomat for his native Jordan; he took over the United Nations' top human rights post last September.

His office said that while he was in Bangui he planned to meet with political leaders and representatives of civil society groups, and to address a seminar with a "call for accountability for all human rights violations."

The republic's leaders have agreed to set up a special court to try serious human rights abuses in the country. Separately, another United Nations agency, Unicef, announced in Geneva that a militia in the Central African Republic had freed 163 children on Friday, some of the thousands who have been conscripted by various factions to serve as cooks, messengers and, in some cases, combatants, The Associated Press reported. Ten armed groups agreed in May to stop conscripting children.

UNICEF announces release of 163 more children by armed group in Central African Republic

NEWS STORY

Source: UN News Centre

29 August 2015 - The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) announced today that 163 children have been released by an armed group in the Central African Republic, where thousands of other boys and girls are still serving as combatants, cooks and messengers for the country's militant factions.

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“This release is a sign that the process of implementing the commitment made by the leaders of these groups, as a part of the peace and reconciliation process, is on track,” UNICEF Representative in the Central African Republic (CAR) Mohamed Malick Fall said in a press release.

“We fully expect to see hundreds more children released before the end of this year,” Mr. Fall said.

The 163 children, five of the girls, were released today in a ceremony in the town of Batangafo where the handover was facilitated by UNICEF and the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA).

The children received medical care and spoke to social workers before they were taken to a transition centre where they will be supported in either going back to school or enrolling in vocational training. UNICEF and partners will also trace and reunify the children with their families.

“MINUSCA is resolved with all partners to ensure the protection of children and I herewith reaffirm its determination to multiply efforts to identify and separate children who are waiting to return to normal life,” said Diane Corner, the deputy special representative of the UN peacekeeping mission in CAR.

According to UNICEF, between 6,000 and 10,000 children have been associated with armed factions in the Central African Republic since 2013 including those serving as combatants, as well as those working as cooks, messengers and in other roles.

Smaller release ceremonies also took place in the capital Bangui last week, and earlier in August in other districts, bringing to 645 the number of children liberated since a May agreement by the country's 10 armed groups to release all children from their ranks.

The agreement also commits the groups to ending additional recruitment of children and gives UNICEF and its partners immediate and unrestricted access to the areas under the groups' control in order to identify and verify the number of affected children and to secure their release.

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SOUTH SUDAN

U.N. council welcomes South Sudan peace deal, threatens arms embargo

NEWS STORY

Source: Reuters

29 August 2015 - The U.N. Security Council on Friday welcomed the signing of a peace agreement aimed at ending South Sudan's 20-month civil war while warning that it remained ready to impose an arms embargo on the country if the deal collapsed.

The 15-nation council's statement came as South Sudanese rebels and the army accused each other for the second time this week of attacks that appeared to undermine the fragile peace deal that President Salva Kiir reluctantly signed days after the rebel side accepted it.

"The Security Council acknowledges that this agreement is the first step in reversing the difficult political and economic situation, and humanitarian and security catastrophe resulting from this crisis," the council said.

The council added that it "calls upon the parties ... to fully implement the agreement."

The statement included a threat to anyone undermining the agreement. It spoke of the council's "readiness to consider appropriate measures ... including through the imposition of an arms embargo and additional targeted sanctions."

Security Council diplomats say they are prepared to move on a U.S.-drafted resolution that would implement an arms embargo if the peace deal falls apart. It could also add additional individuals to a U.N. blacklist.

South Sudan plunged into civil war in December 2013 when a political crisis sparked fighting between forces loyal to Kiir and rebels allied with his former deputy Riek Machar. The conflict has reopened ethnic fault lines that pit Kiir's Dinka against Machar's ethnic Nuer forces.

Kiir, who has led South Sudan since it seceded from Sudan in 2011, last week asked for more time for consultations but was given a two-week deadline to sign or risk U.N. sanctions. He ended up signing the deal but noted that he had reservations.

Machar had signed it first.

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Fighting has killed thousands of people and displaced more than 2.2 million in the oil-producing nation, 500,000 of whom have fled the country since the civil war began. Many rely on aid to survive.

South Sudanese rivals trade accusations over ceasefire violations

NEWS STORY

Source: Sudan Tribune

30 August 2015 - Rival forces in South Sudan conflict have issued statements counter-accusing each other of violations of the permanent ceasefire hours after it came into effect on Saturday midnight as declared by president Salva Kiir and armed opposition leader, Riek Machar.

The spokesperson of the government forces, Colonel Phillip Aguer, issued a series of statements on Saturday evening and again on Sunday, accusing forces loyal to the former vice president, Riek Machar, to have carried out attack on positions held by forces allied to president Kiir in Malakal town.

The intention of the rebels attack on the government forces, according to Aguer, was to gain more territories which they were seeking to use as assembling points in the event peace deal is implemented.

“Their intention is to gain more territories. This is the purpose of these attacks. That was why they attacked the positions of our forces in Malakal yesterday (Saturday) and again today (Sunday),” said Aguer.

“For us, our forces will not attack them but they have the right for self-defense,” he added.

However, the military officer revealed that the government had dispatched troops using river transports for delivery of military supplies to Malakal town, capital of the remaining oil producing Upper Nile state.

Spokesman of the leader of the armed opposition leader, Machar, on Saturday and Sunday said government forces moving with barges and gunboats from Juba to Malakal along the river Nile have been attacking their bases.

“Government forces have been attacking our bases along the river Nile. They attacked Tayer port on 26 August, the day President Kiir signed the peace Agreement. They attacked our base at Adok port on Friday as they continue to move northwards towards

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Malakal. Government forces in Malakal also shelled our base on the west bank,” said Machar’s spokesman, James Gatdet Dak.

Government spokesman, Philip Aguer, admitted that government forces were moving along the river Nile through territories controlled by the rebels, warning that they will fire back in self-defense should they come under attack from the rebel forces.

Peter Adwok Nyaba, one of the leading figures in the armed opposition faction led by Machar confirmed separately that government forces on Sunday shot at one of their speed boats while traveling between Wau Shilluk and Watbajwok around Malakal, wounding one passenger.

“The information we have is that the government forces continued shelling Ditang, Bukieny, Obuwa and Lelo. Our forces did not return fire respecting the orders of the commander-in-chief Dr. Riek Machar to cease fire,” said Nyaba.

Dak also said their forces came under separate attacks on Sunday morning in their bases in Koch, Leer and Mayiandit counties, just hours after the ceasefire went into force.

NEW ACTING SPOKESMAN FOR SPLA-IO

Machar’s spokesman, James Gatdet Dak, who has been handling both political and military issues as spokesman after defection of military spokesman, Brigadier General Lul Ruai Koang, to government, said there is now an acting military spokesman to handle military issues.

“I want to take this opportunity to introduce to you my colleague, Colonel William Gatjiath Deng, who has become our acting military spokesperson,” Dak said on Sunday while distributing to the media Colonel Deng’s first press statement on the military situation after violation of the permanent ceasefire.

Brigadier General Lul Ruai Koang, who was military spokesperson for the rebels’ military defected to the government this year. His deputy, Colonel James L. Thichot Ngundeng, who became the acting military spokesperson also defected from Machar with the group of Major General Peter Gatdet Yak and Major General Gathoth Gatkuoth.

Dak urged journalists to also establish contacts with the acting military spokesman, Deng, as he may be dealing mainly with political issues.

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South Sudan Rebels: Clashes Continue After Cease-Fire

NEWS STORY

Source: Associated Press

30 August 2015 - Government troops on Sunday attacked a village in South Sudan's volatile Unity state on the first day of a cease-fire that both sides have pledged to implement, according to a rebel-appointed official in the state.

The attack on the village in Mayendit County followed attacks on two other villages in the same area Saturday night, John Riek, who coordinates relief activities in an opposition-held part of southern Unity state, told The Associated Press on Sunday.

He said government troops were burning houses and looting livestock on Sunday, and that he himself had to hide in a swamp to escape the violence.

AP could not independently verify his claims.

Military spokesman Col. Philip Aguer said he was unable to verify reports of clashes. Rebel spokesperson James Gatdet Dak said he has not received reports of new clashes. The two sides accused each other of instigating clashes in Upper Nile state yesterday.

Southern Unity has witnessed chaotic violence between the two sides in recent months following a government offensive against rebel forces. Doctors Without Borders said last week it treated 50 people including women and children for gunshot wounds in the town of Leer over the past month.

South Sudan's war began in December 2013 between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and his former deputy, Riek Machar.

Kiir on Wednesday signed a compromise peace agreement, including the cease-fire, following mediation by the leaders of neighboring countries and with U.N. backing. Machar had signed the same document earlier in Ethiopia.

Before signing it, Kiir called the agreement flawed, citing many reservations. Rebels have since said those reservations indicate Kiir is not committed to implementing the entire agreement.

The U.S. has said it will press sanctions against those who violate the accord.

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Why does South Sudan matter so much to the US?

OPINION

Source: BBC

By Karen Allen

30 August 2015 - It wasn't so much a collective sigh of relief when President Salva Kiir finally signed the peace deal this week. It was more a sense of "let's see" as the US issued a warning that it would "hold to account" any of the leaders who might stray from their public commitment.

For the moment, the champagne is being kept on ice.

After more than a year and a half of hostilities and failed peace efforts, threats of sanctions and possible war crimes charges by the US followed.

President Obama has been left feeling deeply unimpressed by the South Sudanese leadership. During his recent East Africa visit there was talk of a "Plan B" if the two parties failed to sign a deal.

A deadline was set and when Salva Kiir stalled and called for more time, Washington deployed its National Security Advisor Susan Rice for some straight talking.

She ditched the diplomatic niceties and singled out the South Sudan president, declaring Washington "deeply disappointed" that he had "squandered" the opportunity to bring peace.

A week or so earlier she delivered another salvo, warning that the leadership was putting its own selfish interests ahead of the nation. Although the US has been deeply frustrated at the impasse, it's clear that it had no plans to simply walk away.

So why does the US care so deeply about South Sudan?

Key points of peace deal:

- Fighting to stop immediately. Soldiers to be confined to barracks in 30 days, foreign forces to leave within 45 days, and child soldiers and prisoners of war freed
- All military forces to leave the capital, Juba, to be replaced by unspecified "guard forces" and Joint Integrated Police
- Rebels get post of "first vice-president"

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- Transitional government of national unity to take office in 90 days and govern for 30 months
- Elections to be held 60 days before end of transitional government's mandate
- Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing to investigate human rights violations

History

The US in general and President Obama in particular, have been looking for a "success story" in Africa. There are of course millions of individual success stories but collectively, like so many other global leaders, they thought they had it when on 9 July 2011 South Sudan became the world's newest state.

But cessation from Sudan and the government in Khartoum was not a magic bullet.

Former Congressman Tom Andrews recalled to me from Washington how he had been in the town of Juba for the birth of South Sudan "literally going to sleep in one country and waking up in another without moving".

That sense of optimism was quickly replaced by a mood of "despair" felt by many ordinary citizens. America had a "special relationship" with the country and so felt a "special responsibility" to help.

You don't have to dig too deep back in history to find American footprints here. I remember a bitter cold night in 2004 huddled from the wind on the shores of Lake Naivasha in Kenya, covering my first ever story in East Africa.

Peace talks were going on late into the night and the towering figure centre stage was John Garang, the leader of the Sudanese rebel movement, the SPLA. He was quietly admired by the American diplomats, shivering alongside us in the cold.

For years the armed militants had been fighting for independence from the north. Garang stood proud through a lengthy signing ceremony in the middle of the night. The documents that bore his name would later become part of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. It was the deal which would seal South Sudan's independence.

Turned on themselves

At the time the SPLA was considered a relatively cohesive liberation movement, fighting to break away from a country whose borders seemed to have been drawn up on the back of an envelope by the colonial administration forcing the largely Christian animist south to live alongside the Muslim, largely Arabic speaking north.

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A year later John Garang would be dead, killed in a mysterious helicopter crash. He would never see an independent South Sudan.

A decade later the leaders who followed in his wake have turned political animosities into an all-out rebellion, where tens of thousands of civilians have been killed and 2.2 million people have been forced to flee their homes.

No longer facing a common enemy as they had done in the fight for independence, they turned on themselves in a conflict tinged with ethnic rivalries. Millions more are hungry and the US has been largely left to pick up the bill.

The north of the country was largely (although not exclusively) Muslim and Arabic speaking, occupying about two-thirds of the land mass. In contrast, the South took its reference points for its race, culture and religion from the rest of sub-Saharan Africa.

After independence in 1956, the "northern-dominated government in Khartoum sought to Arabise and Islamicise the South", explains Francis Deng, a Sudanese academic.

The reaction was to trigger Christian evangelists, largely from the US, to come to Sudan and spread throughout the south to counter the Arab-Muslim model of the north.

Fast forward to today and the the world's newest state has been engaged in what the Royal Africa Society's Richard Dowden says is "the worst war in Africa at the moment" and so with its historic footprint he argues, America feels "responsible".

Strategic influence

The US spent \$1.2bn (£780m) in South Sudan last year. More than half of that was emergency relief.

Even before it seceded from the north, oil-rich Sudan was a top priority for America. According to the US official development assistance database, Sudan has been the third largest recipient of its aid since 2005, behind only Iraq and Afghanistan.

There's also a broad agreement among many who pay attention to this part of the world that global leaders underestimated the complex inter-relationship between the conflict in Darfur in the west of Sudan and the wider struggles between north and south.

As the spotlight was shone on Darfur - a Muslim-on-Muslim war fuelled by competition for scarce resources such as water - for which President Omar al-Bashir has been indicted by the International Criminal Court, the potential conflicts between north and south were somewhat overshadowed.

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News can only deal with one Sudan crisis at a time, a news colleague joked at the time. He was right.

The reality is that some of the players from the Darfur conflict have been implicated in South Sudan's more recent war. Regional neighbours have used it to settle old scores and the US, which heavily backed the South's bid for independence, feels quite possibly let down, almost embarrassed by it all.

Prof Calestous Juma, a Kenyan-born international development specialist at Harvard University, makes a further point. He says that South Sudan is "now at a new geopolitical competition between the US and China, with ethnicity fanning the flames of a political fire created by the volatile mix of religion and oil".

If you agree with that then it's clear the US cannot afford to ignore South Sudan.

Political lobbying

Three successive US presidents have been pushed to make Sudan a foreign policy priority.

In the early 1990s the US granted military support to neighbouring countries to stem the advance of the Sudanese military. In 1993 Sudan was declared a state sponsor of terrorism and faced the imposition of sanctions.

And from the crisis in Darfur sprang a bi-partisan movement - the Save Darfur campaign - which was arguably a huge success in putting this patch of the globe, thousands of miles away from the White House, on to TV screens across the US, declaring it a modern day "genocide" .

One of the movement's founding members was Senator Barack Obama, so he has a very personal reason for caring about South Sudan.

Since then influential figures including the former Director for African Affairs at the National Security Council, John Prendergast, has founded the Enough Project to end genocide.

Driven by humanitarian concerns they have helped to keep the issue alive. Not to mention popular stars such as the actor George Clooney, and ex-Sudanese child soldier Emmanuel Jal, who have acted as goodwill ambassadors for a number of UN agencies working on Sudan and South Sudan.

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Tying up loose ends

In the same way that the US has recently moved to "normalise" relations with Iran, much has been made of a "rapprochement" with Khartoum in recent months.

A recent piece in the Sudan Tribune sheds some light on the behind-the-scenes movements to try to rebuild bilateral ties between Washington and Khartoum, as part of a policy driven by intelligence concerns.

It is perhaps naive (though not inconceivable) to imagine that the US will fully embrace a country whose leader is the subject of an arrest warrant by the International Criminal Court.

It is unlikely to happen in the remaining time Barack Obama has as president.

But Washington's strong rhetoric against the leadership of South Sudan, should it renege on its promises, sends an important message to its northern neighbour. That despite its history and the US backing for the South's drive for independence, it is not beyond reproach.

SUDAN

U.S. special envoy concludes visit to Sudan, regrets not visiting Darfur

NEWS STORY

Source: Sudan Tribune

30 August 2015 - At the end of a five-day visit to Khartoum, the United States Special Envoy to Sudan and South Sudan, Donald E. Booth, has expressed regret for not being able to visit Darfur, saying he hopes to visit the restive region soon.

"I was regrettably unable to make my planned visit to Darfur, but look forward to re-scheduling that visit soon", Booth said in a statement released on Sunday at the conclusion of his first visit to Sudan since nearly two years ago.

"Instead we engaged with leaders of the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), humanitarian actors, and other Darfuri officials on issues of security, inter-communal conflict, and crime, as well as delivery of life-saving assistance, and reconciliation efforts", he added.

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The American envoy didn't mention the reasons that have prevented him from visiting Darfur and whether the Sudanese authorities refused to allow him to visit the region which has been the scene of a deadly conflict between the government and rebel groups since 2003.

Following his arrival in Khartoum on Tuesday, Booth held talks with Sudan's foreign minister, Ibrahim Ghandour, on Saturday but a wall of secrecy has been dropped around it.

The American envoy welcomed the government of Sudan's stated intent to implement a two-month cessation of hostilities and encouraged it "to extend the timeframe and couple it with a negotiated and mutually acceptable mechanism for humanitarian access in order to develop confidence in, and an environment conducive to, an inclusive political dialogue process".

He further said they will likewise engage opposition actors on these critical issues.

The US envoy pointed they engaged the government of Sudan on the full range of issues that frame the bilateral relationship , adding that the visit also included constructive discussions with civil society representatives, business leaders, political parties, humanitarian actors, and other Sudanese citizens.

He said that discussions with the Sudanese government addressed the need for an open national political dialogue to address the root causes of Sudan's persistent internal conflicts, and to realize more inclusive governance arrangements.

"We exchanged views on security concerns, protection of civilians, and improving humanitarian access to conflict-affected populations," he added.

Booth pointed out that discussions also covered economic issues such as Sudan's outstanding debt, sanctions, and ways of utilizing the important sanctions exemptions that have been granted for the benefit of the Sudanese people.

The American envoy expressed hope to return to Sudan to advance dialogue on issues of mutual interest and concern.

Sudan has been on the U.S. list of states that sponsor terrorism since 1993, even though the two countries have strengthened their counter-terrorism cooperation since the September 2001 attacks on Washington and New York.

Washington also imposed economic and trade sanctions on Sudan in 1997 in response to its alleged connection to terror networks and human rights abuses. In 2007, it strengthened the embargo, citing abuses in Darfur which it says constitutes genocide.

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The resumption of dialogue between the two countries come after an agreement reached last February with the then presidential assistant Ibrahim Ghandour on the framework of discussion over normalisation of bilateral relations.

Khartoum in the past said talks should be based on mutual interests and refused Washington's approach linking between the resolution of internal conflicts and lift of sanctions.

DISCUSSIONS WITH BUSINESSPERSON ON SANCTIONS' EFFECTS

One of the events that marked the visit was a meeting held on Thursday 27 August by an American technical team accompanying the U.S. special envoy with Sudanese business community to discuss the negative impact of sanctions on the goods exempted from sanctions.

The vice-president of Sudanese Businessmen and Employers Federation (SBEF) Youssef Ahmed Youssef who took part in the workshop told reporters that the meeting comes in line with the dialogue that Sudanese private sector engaged since several years with American embassy to consider ways to relieve them from the impact of the embargo.

"The workshop discussed the complexities inherent to financial and banking transactions in the sectors exempted from the American sanctions, which now impact the banking dealings with Asian and European banks that were dealing with Sudan," he said.

Sudanese businessmen say that international banks systematically block their transactions because they fear to be prohibited by trade embargoes and sanctions rules. They add that the foreign and even American banks ignore the list of exemptions granted by the OFAC during the past years.

The members of the visiting technical team vowed to exert the necessary efforts to facilitate the implementation of exemptions decided for the benefit of Sudanese people.

In 1997 when the American Administration decide to punish the Sudanese regime for its support of terrorism. The original bill terminated all commercial activities with Sudan but it exempted only one product, Gum Arabic as result of pressures exerted by American industrial groups who wanted to secure their access to this natural product .

Ten years later in 2007 , Washington strengthened the embargo, citing abuses in Darfur which it labelled as genocide. However to ease its negative impact on the ordinary people, the United States Office of Foreign Asset Control (OFAC) since 2010 amended the bill several times and added more exemptions to the list, including agriculture

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equipment, educational exchange programs and scholarships, personal communications hardware and software including smart phones and laptops.

Sudan president heads to China for victory celebrations

NEWS STORY

Source: Xinhua

30 August 2015 - Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir will travel Monday to the Chinese capital Beijing on an official four-day visit to China, according to Sudanese Foreign Ministry spokesman.

"The president will leave Monday for China on a four-day visit to attend China's celebrations of victory over fascism," Ali Al-Saddiq, Sudan's Foreign Ministry spokesman, told reporters Sunday.

"Official talks between the two countries' presidents will be held during the visit on bilateral ties and how to boost them."

In the meantime, Sudan Minister of Transport and Roads Makkawi Mohammed Ahmed on Sunday told reporters that al-Bashir would witness during the visit a signing of a contract between the Sudanese government and a Chinese company to build a new railway line in eastern Sudan that extends for 1,000 kilometers and at cost of 1.4 billion U.S. dollars.

Al-Bashir would also witness the signing of a contract for purchasing two planes and 9 river transport ships besides leasing 3 MA-16 Chinese-made planes, he noted.

Sudan's Bashir rejects AUPSC call for dialogue preparatory meeting

NEWS STORY

Source: Sudan Tribune

30 August 2015 - Sudan's president Omer Hassan al-Bashir has officially rejected the call of the African Union (AU) to hold a pre-dialogue meeting in Addis Ababa, saying he wants the dialogue to be an exclusive Sudanese process.

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Last week, the AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) reiterated its call for an urgent pre-national dialogue meeting of all Sudan's relevant parties, at the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa, to discuss and agree on procedural matters relating to the dialogue.

Bashir, who addressed the army officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers at the Wadi Siedna military compound on Sunday, said his government refuses to hold the dialogue abroad, stressing that the AU, United Nations and the United States can't force the Sudanese government to hold the national dialogue abroad.

He said that doors are open for all parties to discuss ways for resolving Sudan's problems without foreign tutelage, warning rebels groups against insistence on resorting to arms to resolve outstanding issues.

Bashir said the coming year would be the year for achieving a decisive peace, pointing they offer the full opportunity for all parties to engage in the dialogue.

"We are authorized to wage war against those who refuse to engage in the dialogue," he added.

In the same context, Sudan's foreign minister, Ibrahim Ghandour, told the Swedish ambassador to Khartoum, Mette Sunnergren, that his government would not accept to hold any dialogue conference abroad.

In a meeting held on Sunday, Ghandour informed the Swedish diplomat that his government wants the dialogue to be "an exclusive Sudanese process", pointing that Sudan coordinates with the AUPSC and the AU High Implementation Panel (AUHIP) only as partners who offer opinion and efforts to ensure the success of the process.

In September 2014, the peace and security body endorsed a roadmap aiming to facilitate the national dialogue. It provides to hold a national dialogue preparatory meeting in Addis to agree on issues related to the process.

But before they have to negotiate a cessation of hostilities immediately followed by security arrangements.

Bashir launched the national dialogue initiative more than a year and a half ago in which he urged opposition parties and rebels alike to join the dialogue table to discuss all the pressing issues.

But the initiative faced serious setbacks in wake of the government's refusal to create suitable atmosphere in the country leading several major participants to pull out.

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OPPOSITION CONDEMNS GOVERNMENT STANCE

Meanwhile, the leader of the opposition Reform Now Movement (RNM), Ghazi al-Attabani, described the government refusal to participate in the pre-dialogue meeting as “irrational and unsustainable”.

Attabani, who spoke in a press conference held by the Alliance of National Forces (ANF) including the political forces which withdrew from the government-led dialogue on Sunday, said the government would be forced to change its position sooner or later, wondering why it drags its feet on accepting the pre-dialogue meeting while it engages in external negotiations on its entire affairs.

He called on the Sudanese government to stop political manoeuvring on the issue of holding the dialogue inside Sudan, accusing it of trying to portray the opposition forces as seeking to hold the dialogue abroad.

“On the contrary, all political forces are committed to hold an exclusive Sudanese dialogue inside the Sudan”, he added.

RNM leader pointed that some opposition forces agreed to initiate the dialogue by holding a preparatory meeting abroad, describing the AUPSC call for the dialogue as “historic and unprecedented”.

He said the government will be the losing party if it insists on rejecting the AUPSC call for holding the pre-dialogue meeting, warning against underestimating the African support for Sudan.

Attabani further pointed if Africa withdrew its support for Sudan, the government would be exposed to international pressures and would be forced to engage in the dialogue at a higher cost than any genuine dialogue among the sons of Sudan.

He pointed that the recent AUPSC communiqué shows that the regional body was visibly irritated by the procrastination of the Sudanese government in taking the right steps to conduct a genuine and comprehensive dialogue.

“[The AUPSC] is standing one step away from declaring that the ongoing dialogue is worthless because it doesn’t meet the minimum standards of political dialogue that have been implemented in similar experiences,” he said.

Attabani demanded the government to immediately respond to calls made by the “Sudan Call” forces for stopping the war, urging it to engage in serious talks to achieve a cessation of hostilities that leads to a comprehensive ceasefire.

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“It would be futile to talk about political reform or national dialogue or to address Sudan’s economic or regional and international relations crises while the war is ongoing,” he added.

ANF spokesperson, Taha Abdallah Yassin, for his part, said that failure of the government to put the dialogue in the right track would force them to resort the alternative dialogue project which they had agreed to launch with the rebel umbrella Sudan Revolutionary Forces (SRF).

He added the alternative dialogue will be based on the consensus of the entire Sudanese people, saying its outcome would form the basis of the national constitution.

NFC CALLS FOR UPRISING

In a related development, the opposition alliance National Consensus Forces (NCF) issued a statement saying that past and current developments prove they prove right their long-standing position that the government is not serious in its call for a negotiated solution for the country’s issues.

"As the regime has rejected all the requirements and objective conditions for dialogue, the choice of the National Consensus Forces (...) is to overthrow the regime through a popular uprising, political strike and civil disobedience, and total rejection of any settlement aiming to maintain this system," the alliance of the left forces said.

The statement underscored that in line with Berlin Declaration, the opposition forces have to stop seeking a negotiated solution and to work altogether in a popular uprising to topple down the regime of President Omer al-Bashir.

RNM DENIES CONTACTS

RNM deputy chairman Hassan Rizq denied they were being contacted by the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) to resume participation in the ongoing dialogue, accusing NCP leaders of turning a deaf ear to other political forces.

It is worth mentioning that the RNM pulled out of the dialogue last year blaming the NCP for its refusal to implement a number of confidence building measures aimed at creating a conducive environment before the start of the process.

Rizq called on the Sudanese government to listen to the voice of reason and avoid any confrontation with the AUPSC in order not to prevent transfer of the dossier to the UN Security Council.

“It is the duty of the wise men (within the government) to rein in those who seek to drag Sudan to this confrontation (with the AUPSC) ,” he added.

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TANZANIA

Tanzania's main opposition coalition kicks off campaign

NEWS STORY

Source: AFP

29 August 2015 - A coalition of four main opposition parties in Tanzania launched their campaign for the October election on Saturday, vowing to end five decades of the ruling party's domination of the east African country's politics.

Addressing a massive rally in the commercial capital of Dar es Salaam, the coalition's presidential candidate Edward Lowassa, said the time has come for Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party to go.

"We must get rid of the inefficient and corrupt regime under system to bring about an end to poverty, massive unemployment and wanton plunder of the country's natural resources," Lowassa said.

The race for the October 25 elections for president, parliamentary seats and civic leaders is seen as the tightest in Tanzania's history.

The ruling CCM party has dominated politics since modern Tanzania was formed in 1964, and currently has two-thirds of seats in parliament.

The four main opposition parties have chosen ex-prime minister Lowassa who defected last month from the CCM to join Chadema, the main opposition party, as their joint presidential candidate.

Other parties in the coalition are NCCR-Mageuzi, National League for Democracy(NLD) and Civic United Front (CUF).

Lowassa, 61, served as prime minister between 2005 and 2008.

He had tried to win the CCM nomination, and was widely seen as a frontrunner among 42 candidates, but he lost out to works minister John Magufuli.

The CCM is also seen as having been weakened by internal splits and a string of graft scandals and recently witnessed its high profile members, including ex-prime minister Frederick Sumaye and former home affairs minister Lawrence Masha, defecting to join the coalition.

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Tanzania, with over 50 million people, is east Africa's most populous country, with economic growth of more than seven percent, according to the World Bank.

Despite advances, the country remains very poor by regional and international standards, the World Bank says, with agriculture the key sector, providing a quarter of gross domestic product and employing three-quarters of the population.

Tanzania Electoral Chief Promises Peaceful, Credible Election

NEWS STORY

Source: VOA

28 August 2015- The chairman of the National Electoral Commission of Tanzania says his organization is determined to ensure the general election scheduled for October 25 is peaceful and credible.

Justice Damien Lubuva says the NEC is closely working with all political parties in the run-up to the vote, to ensure an equal playing field during the poll. Some critics have accused the commission of not using a transparent process when it recently compiled a voters list to be used for the elections.

They say that lack of transparency could undermine the credibility of the election.

But, NEC chairman Lubuva disagreed. He says for the first time, the NEC used the biometric system - a system that uses human body characteristics to determine identity - to compile the voters register ahead of the general election.

Lubuva says an estimated 24 million prospective voters were registered ahead of the elections.

"That was quite transparent in the sense that before we embarked on that one we had meetings with various stakeholders, including political parties, religious leaders and civil society, and explained that we are going in for a new system of voter registration," he said. "That is how it was started...So to say that the process has not been transparent, I think it is really an overstatement."

The October election will be Tanzania's fourth general election following the reintroduction of a multiparty democratic system in 1993. This year's presidential vote is expected to be the most competitive following the recent defection of former prime minister Edward Lowassa from the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi to the opposition Chadema.

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Lubuva says elections in Tanzania have been generally peaceful, and he adds that the NEC looks forward to maintaining the tradition of administering yet another round of peaceful and transparent elections.

“That is what we are aspiring to achieve in the next elections in October. For that reason, we have been making all necessary arrangements to enable the voters to vote freely to enable the political parties that are participating to have free access to the voting,” he said.

Political parties have so far nominated eight aspirants to compete in the upcoming presidential election.

Lubuva says the electoral body has urged the political parties, the candidates and prospective voters to help ensure the campaign is devoid of violence. He also says police have been urged to enforce the law but not to interfere with the electoral process.