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Starving War, Feeding Peace

And Setting the Table for National Dialogue in Sudan

By Akshaya Kumar and John Prendergast
December 2014



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COVER PHOTO:

A woman fires a fuel-efficient stove made in a camp for internally displaced people (IDPs), near Tawila, North Darfur. Photo Credit: United Nations

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Executive Summary

There is no doubt that some form of a national dialogue will be a key ingredient to a comprehensive peace in Sudan.¹ But, to have a transformative effect on governance, that process needs to be meaningful, genuine, and inclusive. Despite hopeful signals in September 2014, Sudan's nascent national dialogue process is currently none of those things. As it stands right now, the dialogue's format remains imbalanced, exclusive and restrictive.² Beyond problems with the structure of the process, the Sudanese government's actions outside of the dialogue forum have further undermined prospects for genuine discourse about the way forward.³ But, this could change, if the Sudanese government decides to engage meaningfully and demonstrates its commitment by fulfilling six preconditions, including an alternate neutral administration for the dialogue. International stakeholders now have an opportunity to help to rebalance power dynamics and revitalize the much-needed but deeply compromised process.

Undoubtedly, the time is ripe for this kind of discourse. As evidenced by the August 2014 Paris Declaration and the early December 2014 Call for Sudan Declaration, there is now unprecedented unity amongst Sudan's armed and unarmed opposition.⁴ Notwithstanding threats of reprisal from state security, a diverse group of opposition leaders jointly pledged to "work to dismantle the one-party state regime and replace it with a state founded on equal citizenship."⁵ In addition, after almost a decade of stove-piped negotiations, which looked at each of Sudan's regional conflicts separately, competing regional peace efforts for Darfur and the Two Areas are finally being unified under the same umbrella. Although negotiations on both tracks are currently suspended, the African Union (AU) mediation's new "two tracks one process" approach represents a groundbreaking shift towards a "comprehensive approach."⁶ Finally, negotiations around stopping the war are being linked to conversations about

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governing the country. As a result, many believe that a window of opportunity for change has opened in Sudan. In a recent brief, the Sudanese policy and research organization Sudan Democracy First Group (SDFG) and the international violence prevention organization Saferworld argue that there is now “a glimmer of hope that a comprehensive resolution to Sudan’s conflicts may be possible.”⁷

Despite these positive signs, many indicators point in the opposite direction. Most worrisome, despite an ostensible commitment to dialogue as the basis for conflict resolution, the Sudanese government’s security services and aligned militias continue to inflict extraordinary violence on people throughout Sudan.⁸ The mass rape by Sudanese army troops of women in Tabit, North Darfur has drawn international headlines,⁹ but the sad truth is that state-sponsored sexual violence is now a feature of life along the country’s long-marginalized periphery.¹⁰ In the country’s war zones, the army, the security services’ new Rapid Support Forces, and allied militias continue to commit war crimes and crimes against humanity on a daily basis. Notwithstanding an explicit promise from Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir not to seek another term as president,¹¹ the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) announced in October 2014 that he will run for reelection in 2015.¹² In leaked minutes from an August 2014 meeting of senior Sudanese security officials,¹³ one of the government’s senior decision-makers is quoted as planning to “attack [those in the war zones] before the harvest and bombard their food stores and isolate them completely.”¹⁴ Another vowed that “those who think to go out and demonstrate against us must know that their lives will be the price of the change.”¹⁵ In the wake of the December 2014 Call for Sudan Declaration, state security forces carried through on these threats by arresting Faroug Abu Eisa, head of the National Consensus Forces, and Dr. Amin Mekki Madani, chairman of the Sudanese Civil Society Initiative.¹⁶ Both men join hundreds of other political prisoners who remain under detention. As of mid-December 2014, prospects for a credible and meaningful national dialogue in Sudan are dim.

But things do not have to remain this way. With their appeal for debt relief on Sudan’s behalf, the AU and its mediation team has already invited external actors to help shape the process.¹⁷ Many in Sudanese civil society groups, including SDFG, cautioned against steps like unconditional debt relief. Instead, they have urged “members of the international community [to] clearly outline the requirements for a genuine process before any support [is] provided [to the government of Sudan].” Thus, the key to forward progress lies in the application of leverage. Economic tools hold the potential to alter the calculations of those involved in the dialogue, in particular the player holding most of the cards—the ruling NCP leadership.

Economic leverage against the Sudanese government has been effective in the past. The recent fines imposed by the United States on international banks that laundered money for the Sudanese regime,¹⁸ the edicts from the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia prohibiting commercial banking transactions with Sudan,¹⁹ and recent restrictions on Sudanese livestock exports to Saudi Arabia have had a deep impact in Sudan.²⁰ In March 2014, a Sudanese banker was quoted lamenting that “most of the accounts or money going out of Sudan [is] completely frozen.”²¹ But without additional measures, the momentary influence on Sudan’s choices that the international community has cultivated will dissipate. The Sudanese regime is in survival mode: it will not consider allowing a genuine dialogue unless it sees no other option. Further steps to exert greater pressure on the Sudanese government could include: restructuring or delaying the requested debt relief, enhanced enforcement actions against sanctions violators, with a focus on banks and other financial institutions, deepening targeted sanctions against officials and entities fueling war in Sudan, urging Qatar to stop its financial support to the Sudan Central Bank, and making a push to restrict markets for the sale of conflict-affected gold from Sudan. By further

raising the cost of doing business with Sudan's ruling elites, these coercive measures will stop the country's war machinery.

At the same time, there is room for positive economic engagement as well. Once Sudan's government demonstrates its willingness to participate in a meaningful national dialogue with a new neutral administration, a package of economic incentives, including steps towards debt relief and the relaxation of existing sanctions, could be put on the table. These incentives should be explicitly conditioned on six changes:

- (1) An end to the deliberate targeting of civilians in the war zones, especially aerial bombardment and attacks by the Rapid Support Forces. An internationally monitored cessation of hostilities agreement would cover these measures, but negotiations on that issue are moving at a snail's pace. In the meantime, even if it does not end its battles with the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF), the government of Sudan should commit to stopping asymmetric attacks on civilians.
- (2) Both international and national aid workers should be granted unfettered humanitarian access to all parts of the country, in particular rebel-held areas of South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Darfur, which have not seen aid for years.
- (3) The National Security Forces Act, which grants immunity for acts committed by state security forces, should be repealed. This law has allowed acts amounting to crimes against humanity to be carried out by government forces with impunity.
- (4) President Bashir should honor his promise to release all political prisoners and assure the continued safety of those in the opposition. Hundreds of other youth activists and opposition political leaders are under near-constant state security surveillance and face frequent arrest and detention. Among others, Faroug Abu Eisa and Dr. Amin Mekki Madani, who were arrested in the wake of the December Call for Sudan Declaration, remain in government custody. Credible dialogue can only occur once these opposition figures are released.
- (5) Even as cessation of hostilities negotiations continue, progress on expanding the national dialogue process should be carried out simultaneously. To allow for greater inclusivity, the existing 7+7 framework for the national dialogue must be significantly revamped. In accord with the demand from both civil society and the new Call for Sudan coalition, a new neutral administration should be established for the dialogue.. Additionally, women's groups should be given their own constituency in the dialogue process.
- (6) The new national dialogue administrators should engage in broad consultations with traditional authorities, leaders of camps for the internally displaced people, and refugees and heads of Arab tribal militias. Without such consultations, a political deal will not be enforceable on the ground.

The NCP is Its Own Worst Enemy

Structured national dialogue is not a new idea for Sudan.²² Neither is the notion that the problems plaguing Sudan's vast marginalized periphery are inextricably linked to governance in the center of the country.²³ Activists and diplomats alike recognize that to address the insurgencies in Darfur, the Nuba Mountains, and Blue Nile, a genuine, inclusive negotiation must occur over how Sudan is governed.

In early 2014, facing mounting economic pressure,²⁴ the ruling NCP, which has controlled government for over a quarter century, succumbed to these entreaties. But, true to form, the ruling party gave themselves a disproportionately powerful voice. The dialogue is being shepherded by a governing body composed of 14 individuals based on a "7+7" representation formula. Half of the seats are officially reserved for regime supporters.²⁵ Further, many point out that the other half of the participants, who are labeled as the "opposition" representation, are actually regime allies as well.²⁶ The formula excludes significant forces for change in Sudan, such as youth groups, civil society, the unarmed political opposition National Consensus Forces (NCF) and the armed opposition SRF. As opposition politician Farouk Abu Issa explains, "Without the NCF and the SRF, the dialogue [won't] lead to real outcome[s]."²⁷

Reflecting on these realities, in May 2014, civil society activists with the Sudan Democracy First Group lambasted the purported dialogue as a "monologue."²⁸ Others characterized the whole process as an attempt to reunify the Islamist movement rather than spark a meaningful dialogue with all segments of society.²⁹ This analysis is supported by the leaked August 2014 meeting minutes, which quote a senior regime official describing a plan to pay off officials of the Islamist-oriented Popular Congress Party to "guarantee the consent and support of all the Islamic movements."³⁰

Sudanese regime officials and AU mediators have sought to convince Sudan's creditors that the prospects of the national dialogue are hindered by the economic problems caused by international sanctions and a lack of debt relief for the Sudanese government. However, the blame for the lack of a credible dialogue process rests squarely with Sudan's NCP. The government's baby steps forward on the political front, particularly the commitment to hold a meeting in Addis Ababa to discuss amending the dialogue structure, have been systematically undermined by the government's repressive actions against free press, civil society and political leaders who dare to voice criticism of its counterinsurgency policies. Along the periphery, the government's indiscriminate aerial bombardment campaign has intensified.³¹ The Sudanese government has deployed a new paramilitary group that targets civilians called the Rapid Support Forces.³² In a previous report, the Enough Project highlighted the emergence of these forces, describing them as the "Janjaweed reincarnate."³³ When considered along with the mounting humanitarian need in the area,³⁴ the statements made by senior army in the leaked meeting minutes offer evidence of a government campaign of "extermination" in the Nuba Mountains.³⁵ Over and over again, the Sudanese government's actions speak eloquently to their commitment to a "military" rather than political solution.

Towards a Comprehensive Approach to Peace in Sudan

In the past, attempts to push for a "comprehensive approach" to Sudan's problems have always been met by vehement opposition from the Sudanese government, which has insisted that each regional conflict requires its own process. Civil war in the south was settled in 2004 through negotiations in

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Kenya, in Naivasha and Machakos.³⁶ Peace in the east was brokered in 2006 in Asmara, Eritrea.³⁷ After being neglected while the southern peace process was implemented, Abyei, Blue Nile and South Kordofan are once again on the agenda in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.³⁸ During much of this period, separate discussions about Darfur have been held in Abuja, Nigeria, Tripoli, Libya, and, most recently, Doha, Qatar.³⁹ Keeping these peace processes separate from one another was an effective divide-and-rule tactic. It allowed the government to shop around for favorable international forums and pit marginalized communities against one another in their efforts to draw international attention and support.⁴⁰ In doing so, President Bashir's government successfully managed to participate in dozens of peace negotiations while avoiding the foundational questions threatening its rule.

In light of this history, many welcomed President Bashir's January 2014 offer to initiate a wide-ranging dialogue for Sudan.⁴¹ Indeed, his call for a national dialogue represented a rare admission that the country is facing serious governance challenges. In the wake of President Bashir's announcement, both former South African President and lead AU mediator Thabo Mbeki and senior diplomats from the United States, the United Kingdom and Norway, a group known as the Troika, made a push to end support to the Doha-based process for Darfur. All sides, including Sudan's government, have now agreed on the need for a strategy to link up the country's previously fragmented peace processes. In late October, the European Union Foreign Affairs Council, consisting of foreign ministers of all member states, described the national dialogue as the "best opportunity to make progress" towards the goal of comprehensively tackling "the political, economic and social causes of persisting conflict."⁴² The Council went on to declare support for "current efforts to create a comprehensive platform for the facilitation of the National Dialogue that will integrate the different peace and dialogue processes for Sudan's regional conflicts."⁴³ For its part, in September, the AU Peace and Security Council asked "all international actors with a mediation mandate to pool their resources together, as well as harmonize their interventions, in a manner that optimizes the window of opportunity presented by the National Dialogue, with a view to finding a comprehensive and lasting solution to the conflicts in Sudan."⁴⁴ In accord with this recommendation, at the end of November 2014, the AU mediator, President Mbeki, convened back-to-back talks on both the Two Areas and Darfur.⁴⁵ Not all parties were in the same room at the same time, but much more coordination was evident. As a result, when the government of Sudan offered to engage in comprehensive negotiation with the Nuba rebels but demanded only local-level talks with the Darfuris, the process broke down. Previously successful "divide and rule" tactics are less effective in light of the newly coordinated mediation. Now, both the Darfur and the Two Areas tracks of talks are suspended due to the Sudanese government's refusal to discuss a comprehensive agenda with the Darfur movements.

Unprecedented Opposition Unity

For decades, Sudanese people have been waiting for their fragmented opposition to come together around a single platform. Mutual hostility and suspicion, however, stalled collaboration between the country's unarmed political opposition based in Khartoum and those carrying weapons and fighting for their rights across the country's marginalized periphery.⁴⁶ The armed opposition questions the unarmed political opposition parties for their silence during the height of the genocide in Darfur and their tacit complicity with the system of marginalization that underpins the government. Activists' criticism of establishment leaders like National Umma Party (NUP) leader Sadig al-Mahdi, who previously served as prime minister of Sudan, is particularly strident. Frustration with unfulfilled promises, failed and

exclusionary political processes, and human rights abuses by leaders, runs high.⁴⁷ For its part, the unarmed political opposition has been wary about collaborating with rebels due to fear of reprisal from the regime and worries about being associated with violent regime change. Previous attempts to bring the two groups together for dialogue in Geneva were undermined when the Sudanese government refused to allow opposition leaders to leave Sudan.⁴⁸

Despite this fraught history, in early 2014, Sudan's unarmed and armed opposition groups began quiet back-channel outreach to one another. Seeds for collaboration had already been planted through the January 2013 New Dawn Charter.⁴⁹ Since both groups were suspicious of the government's national dialogue initiative, they joined forces to challenge the government-led 7+7 dialogue process. After three days of meetings between the two sides in Paris, al-Mahdi, Sudan People's Liberation Movement - North (SPLM-N) and SRF leader Malik Agar, and other rebel leaders signed a declaration that unifies Sudan's opposition under a single platform. The Paris Declaration group commits their alliance to focus on bringing a comprehensive and just peace to the country. Both sides promise to work together to "achieve full democratic transformation in Sudan... through political and diplomatic means."⁵⁰ As the Paris Declaration group sought to expand its membership, a flurry of meetings followed in London,⁵¹ Berlin,⁵² Cairo,⁵³ Addis Ababa,⁵⁴ Doha,⁵⁵ and Khartoum.⁵⁶ While still in its early days, the alliance appears to be gaining ground and influence. Despite President Bashir's open threat to prosecute those who collaborate with the armed opposition, a number of representatives from the NCF, including the Popular Congress Party, travelled to Addis Ababa for an unprecedented meeting with Sudanese civil society groups, the NUP, and the SRF. After days of negotiation, the Sudanese opposition coalesced around a two-page "Call for Sudan" Declaration, which commits them to cooperating with the emerging dialogue process.

The fact that the armed opposition and al-Mahdi were able to come together around a single platform points to the absence of political space within Sudan. Al-Mahdi had previously been participating in the dialogue process. However, after he was detained and charged with defamation for daring to criticize the Rapid Support Forces, his party was functionally forced out of the political arena.⁵⁷ Since then, even though his daughter has been arrested, al-Mahdi has continued to throw his weight behind the armed opposition.

Counterproductive Rhetoric from the Ruling Party

Unfortunately, despite the resumption of negotiations, President Bashir has slowed progress with his belligerent rhetoric about the dialogue itself. In speech at the Khartoum state convention of his ruling NCP in late September 2014, President Bashir made clear that the budding alliances between the armed and unarmed opposition groups were going to be tested. In the wake of what was widely believed to be a productive meeting with President Mbeki, President Bashir threatened to arrest opposition leader al-Mahdi for colluding with the armed opposition.⁵⁸ More recently, in late November 2014, as the first round of peace talks were wrapping up in Addis Ababa, President Bashir echoed these sentiments again at a press conference.⁵⁹ At that event, President Bashir vowed that government would not permit opposition parties to consult and coordinate with the armed movements, even for the national dialogue's purposes. President Bashir's threats went further. Reminding citizens of the "ceiling for freedoms" in Sudan, he warned that planning toward a convening of a national dialogue did not mean

that people had absolute freedom of expression or association.⁶⁰ An aggressive speech by the ruling party vice chairman and presidential assistant Ibrahim Ghandour deemed the new Sudan Call Declaration accord an “unholy alliance” manufactured by Sudan’s “international enemies.”⁶¹

But not all NCP officials have taken such a hard line. In early September 2014, members of the opposition Paris Declaration group, the alliance of the SRF and NUP, and representatives of the current NCP-dominated dialogue met in Addis Ababa and agreed to some key adjustments to the national dialogue process. Both sides separately signed identical documents with President Mbeki. They were thus able to reach a consensus on many key issues about expanded participation. In early November 2014, the first General Assembly of the National Dialogue met and endorsed the proposal.⁶² At that time, it promised to dispatch a delegation to Addis Ababa to discuss an amended process. However, as of December 2014, although it sent delegations to meet with the armed opposition to discuss a cessation of hostilities, the government of Sudan had not taken any steps towards implementing the promised amendments to the national dialogue process.

Recent rhetoric highlights the tensions within the ruling coalition. Seemingly ignoring the promise to meet with the opposition in Ethiopia, Presidential Assistant Abdul Rahman Al-Sadiq al-Mahdi announced in early December that all future discussions about the national dialogue should take place inside Sudan.⁶³ It seems that while some in his party are willing to move with an amended dialogue process, Sudan’s International Criminal Court-indicted president has drawn a line in the sand.

Danger of an Elite Bargain

Even if expanded significantly, a national dialogue process limited to Sudan’s political elites will be insufficient to capture the vibrant and diverse perspectives held by Sudan’s myriad stakeholders. Including a range of participants in the dialogue process is critical. Amjed Farid, an activist with the Sudan Change Now social and political movement, calls for an equal seat at the table for civil society, noting that in his assessment the traditional political parties no longer represent their constituencies.⁶⁴ Pointing to the role of armed actors like Musa Hilal and Mohammad Hamdan Hemmeti, academic and Rift Valley Institute fellow Magdi el Gizouli cautions, “assuming [that] an elite bargain would deliver the type of transformation we saw in South Africa is a bit short-sighted and it does not consider the socio-economic realities in Sudan today.”⁶⁵ Ahmed Adam, a Sudanese scholar at Cornell University, suggests that the national dialogue must be much more inclusive, otherwise it will simply allow the NCP to consolidate power.⁶⁶ As Suliman Baldo, head of the Sudan Democracy First Group, writes “It is no coincidence then that [the projected] timeframe [for the national dialogue] would allow for a process that conveniently concludes in time for the ruling party elites and its junior governing allies to go into the April 2015 elections.”⁶⁷ In a later interview, he added, “They are using the national dialogue to bring over opposition parties and give a certain democratic legitimacy to the renewal in power of the National Congress Party.”⁶⁸ These diverse Sudanese voices, each advocating for an inclusive and broadly representative national dialogue process, reflect a broad spectrum of Sudanese stakeholders whose views should inform the discussions and decisions.

Efforts to broaden the range of participants in the dialogue have already begun. Recognizing that alternating periods of elite and authoritarian rule have resulted in deterioration of the fabric of Sudan’s

civil society, the National Endowment for Democracy, Justice Africa, and Columbia University are facilitating the Dialogue of Marginalized Groups as an alternative forum to envisage and plan for a more inclusive future.⁶⁹ The planned amendments to the national dialogue process should include an initiative to tap into these and other civil society networks to inform its consultations on an appropriate structure and format for future engagement. This process will not be without its challenges. As SDFG cautions, previous NCP-run “societal dialogue” meetings were not “genuinely representative of civil society or the grassroots” since the process was “designed and dominated by the NCP.”⁷⁰ This word of warning highlights the need for a neutral and independent administration for the national dialogue.

In the past, the inclusion of women and youth groups has been structured to support the interests of the combatants. In Darfur’s successive peace processes, the NCP sought to dilute the impact of the inclusion of these groups by recruiting its own civil society or women’s groups to participate. The current national dialogue process and planning has thus far done little to promote the inclusion of women or civil society. In fact, civil society discussions have been relegated to a separate track. South Sudanese politician Dr. Anne Itto has criticized the process around the Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended the second Sudan civil war, noting that women were treated like “guests at the table.”⁷¹ However, creating space for women is not enough. Awadiya Ahmed Yahia adds, during the Darfur peace process, women had unified on the need for female representation in negotiations but were unable to unify themselves across their political differences, which prevented them from forming one persuasive team of female delegates to deliver and negotiate the specific needs of women.⁷² Women in other settings, however, have unified to advocate successfully for greater representation in the national dialogue and political decision-making. For example, throughout Yemen’s National Dialogue Conference (NDC), female Yemeni delegates vociferously argued for 30 percent representation in the structures and decision-making processes of the conference.⁷³ The Yemeni process resulted in a recommendation to preserve a 30 percent quota for women in government roles.⁷⁴ Empowering Sudanese women to participate in negotiations and national dialogues in the way Yemeni women participated in the National Dialogue Conference would strengthen Sudan’s national dialogue processes.

A robust national dialogue will also require consultations with Sudan’s trade unions, religious leaders, and even tribal militants from Darfur. In Darfur and Greater Kordofan, these tribal militias still hold great sway. Without the endorsements of these constituencies, agreements reached at the highest levels will not have a positive impact in the country. A genuine national dialogue process should address these issues and work to counter them at the negotiating table and within Sudan. As SDFG explains, “any process taking place must be held in parallel with a grass-roots, bottom-up process that includes local communities, especially in the peripheries.”⁷⁵

Cultivating Leverage and Shifting Calculations

Two positive trends are clear. First, opposition groups have finally found some common ground. They are now attempting to collectively articulate alternatives. This is worth watching. Second, both the African Union mediation and Troika diplomats are actively pushing for the unification of the previously stove-piped peace processes for Sudan. President Mbeki, who had previously refused even to meet with the SRF, signed a document that recognizes their legitimate right to participate in the process. The government of Sudan, which previously refused to engage with Darfuri rebel leaders outside the context of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD), finally sat down with group for formal negotiations.

Unfortunately, this progress on negotiations towards a cessation of hostilities agreement has occurred without any forward momentum on amending the dialogue process itself.

If the international community strategically engages with the process, there is the potential for real and transformative change in Sudan. By utilizing the economic levers in its control, the international community can secure much-needed leverage over the Sudanese government. At the same time, the international community should make it clear that economic incentives would be triggered once six key reforms are achieved.

Sudan's economic problems, which are already severe, have been made worse by the civil war in South Sudan.⁷⁶ South Sudanese oil production has fallen by a third as a result of the civil war, which broke out in December 2013.⁷⁷ Sudan, which benefits from oil transit fees through its pipelines, has lost a similar share of revenue. The international community should act collectively to cultivate additional coercive authority and seek to shift calculations within the halls of power in Khartoum. Restructuring or delaying debt relief, enhanced enforcement of sanctions violators to include banks and other financial institutions found to be laundering money for the Sudan government, deepening targeted sanctions against officials and entities fueling war in Sudan, and making a push to restrict markets for the sale of conflict-affected gold from Sudan could all contribute to this effort.

In the absence of oil revenue, Sudan's government has turned to gold to keep its economy afloat. The country's annual gold production, over 40 tons that yielded around \$2.2 billion in 2012, has become an important source of foreign exchange.⁷⁸ This year, Sudan's government estimates its gold production will reach 64 tons.⁷⁹ The Sudanese Central Bank, which relies on gold to stabilize its currency, has been buying gold from across the country to secure an independent source of foreign exchange. As a consequence, although gold is mined artisanally by small-scale producers, a significant percentage of gold from North Darfur's newly discovered mines is funneled through the state⁸⁰ before being exported to Dubai.⁸¹

As a consequence of gold's increasing importance to the government of Sudan, a multilateral commitment to targeting the Sudanese government's economic lifelines by stigmatizing Sudan's gold as "conflict-affected" could be a powerful tool.⁸² Industry leaders and refiners have already pledged to apply existing due diligence standards to their purchases of gold. Highlighting possible connections to conflict would ensure that they do similar diligence before purchasing gold originating from Sudan. In 2012, hundreds of thousands of people were displaced as a result of the state-sponsored attacks by Abbala militias on the Jebel Amer mines in North Darfur.⁸³ Now, the Beni Hussein community, traditional custodians of the area, have been largely excluded from the benefits of the mine's profits. Although the situation remains fluid, as of December 2014, the mines were in the hands of the influential Darfuri leader Musa Hilal and aligned Abbala militiamen, who historically formed the backbone of the Janjaweed.⁸⁴ While Hilal and the Sudanese government are currently at odds with one another, that power struggle does not prevent the government from benefitting from the area's gold. In addition to pressuring the government, a stigma on gold from Sudan would prevent Abbala militias from continuing to benefit from their ethnic cleansing campaign in Darfur's Jebel Amer area.

Additionally, international partners should also make it clear that debt relief for the Sudanese government is not on the table as long as wars inflame Sudan's periphery, the military engages in indiscriminate attacks on civilians, and transformational political reform remains obstructed.⁸⁵ The

International Monetary Fund's recent decision to begin a staff-monitored program of macroeconomic reforms culminating in debt relief must be challenged.⁸⁶ The Fund's focus on technical criteria without appropriate consideration of the country's ongoing conflicts sends a deeply problematic signal. Although the decision to forgive debt rests with Paris Club members—financial officials from the largest creditor governments—the Fund's engagement should be more conflict-sensitive. SDFG asks that all international stakeholders commit that “debt relief and the removal of sanctions, as well as any new economic support package and concessionary loans, will only take place following a nation-wide cessation of hostilities and a comprehensive, inclusive and accountable national dialogue held in a conducive environment.”⁸⁷

Finally, the United States and the United Nations should accelerate their sanctions enforcement against banks and businessmen who help keep the Sudanese regime afloat. Pressure should also be applied to convince Persian Gulf states, in particular Qatar, to stop offering direct budgetary support to the Sudanese government.⁸⁸ In early April 2014, Qatar announced a \$1 billion deposit straight into Sudan's Central Bank, providing a significant boost for the Sudan's ailing economy.⁸⁹ However, tensions between Qatar and Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) continue to grow over support for the Sudanese regime. While Qatar has held out a financial lifeline to the government, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have withdrawn support. Recently, the UAE closed many Sudanese bank accounts, stopped internal and outgoing wire transfers, and even rejected a gold shipment from Sudan.⁹⁰ For its part, Saudi Arabia told Sudanese President Bashir to explore alternate facilities for his medical treatment.⁹¹ These growing fissures within the traditionally united Gulf states offer a potential opportunity to reframe regional dynamics around leverage on Sudan. Since Qatar was forced to pledge to stop its support to Islamist groups by the regional Gulf Cooperation Council, international stakeholders have a chance to push for that promise to extend to Sudan as well.⁹²

Conclusion

It is clear that the current national dialogue process is not working. However, a combination of economic carrots and sticks at this critical turning point can alter the Sudanese government's cost-benefit calculus in ways that create new potential for an inclusive political dialogue. The international community should increase economic pressure on the Sudanese government while offering debt relief if government leaders implement the six changes outlined above. Sudan will only have a chance for a peaceful future once the regime is willing to negotiate genuine reforms with the armed and unarmed opposition. A sequence for potential success is clear. First, further economic measures should be imposed on the regime to alter its cost-benefit calculations. Second, if the government meets the six conditions outlined above, the international community should consider incentives to encourage further cooperation. While they are an important component of the equation, considering incentives too early in the process could derail forward progress.

Endnotes

¹ Princeton Lyman and Jon Temin, "Pathway to National Dialogue in Sudan," (Washington: United States Institute of Peace, August 13, 2013), available at <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PB155.pdf>; see additional remarks by Princeton Lyman: Arif Omer, "Sudan – A Conversation with Former Special Envoy Princeton Lyman, Part One: Sudan National Dialogue," United States Institute of Peace, April 28, 2014, available at <http://www.usip.org/olivebranch/sudan-conversation-former-special-envoy-princeton-lyman>; United States Institute of Peace, "National Dialogue in Sudan: Options and Outcomes," panel discussion, March 24, 2014, webcast available at <http://www.usip.org/events/national-dialogue-in-sudan>.

² The 7 + 7 Steering Committee includes seven government-appointed individuals and seven additional designated opposition individuals who many critics claim are nonetheless aligned with the government. This 7 + 7 preparatory committee for the national dialogue "leads" the General Assembly of the National Dialogue. The General Assembly of the National Dialogue convened its first meeting in November 2014 and endorsed the Addis agreement between the 7+7 and the President Mbeki on the roadmap for inclusion of opposition groups into the dialogue. While the Assembly promised to dispatch a delegation to Addis Ababa to discuss possible amendments to the process with the opposition, this has yet to occur.

³ Suliman Baldo, "An Alternative National Dialogue: Sudan's last chance for sustainable peace and unity," *Sudan Tribune*, August 30, 2014, available at <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article52651>; Sudan Tribune, "Arman accuses Sudan gov't of sabotaging African peace efforts," October 7, 2014, available at <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article52651>; Sudan Consortium, "Sudanese civil society say no shortcut to national dialogue," Press release, available at http://www.sudanconsortium.org/darfur_consortium_actions/pressreleases/2014/Civil%20Society%20No%20Shortcut%20Nat%20Dialogue%20EN.pdf; James Copnall, "Sudan: Is the National Dialogue really dead (and did it ever really exist anyway)," *African Arguments*, June 25, 2014, available at <http://africanarguments.org/2014/06/25/sudan-is-the-national-dialogue-really-dead/>; Aala Abdelgadir, "Sudan's National Dialogue: Failure to Launch," *Muftah*, June 3, 2014, available at <http://muftah.org/sudans-national-dialogue-failure-launch/#.VIDBYCQo4dV>; Muhammad Osman, "Sudan arrest threatens national dialogue," *Al Jazeera*, May 19, 2014, available at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/05/sudan-arrest-threat-national-dialogue-201451954542981274.html>.

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