

TALKING POINT: Something Big is Going on in Sudan, but Media is Sound Asleep

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Nov. 23 . 2017 - In Summary

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For reasons that I may not know, recent and current trends in Sudan are going without any serious media attention. There is scant reporting on the dialogue process that began in 2013 and which is now resulting in a transition, starting with a transitory era that saw the recent appointment of a prime minister of the Republic of the Sudan (North Sudan) for the first time in many years. Keen observers of political developments in Africa must have begun to realise that Sudan is currently in the spotlight. But why this gross anomaly in the media landscape in Africa?

For about four years now, the Republic of Sudan has embarked on a national dialogue process that involves the coming together of numerous contending factions and groups to participate in a broad national consultation process that seeks to heal the wounds of division and factionalism that partly came with the secession of South Sudan in 2011. While the Southerners have been embroiled in protracted conflict, the Republic of Sudan has been involved in a smooth internal transition that will be a pointer to the country's future after parting ways with Juba. The process includes national dialogue in the wake of existing political and diplomatic turbulence that emanates from international pressure on the nation. It



must please every objective analyst that the dialogue has now reached a good stage and that serious political reforms are underway for the country to determine how political succession will be handled from now on and in the years to come. It is noteworthy that such positive developments are happening at a time when self-styled global champions of democracy are in turmoil as best exemplified by the United States of America after the election of Donald Trump and Europe after Brexit.

The national dialogue has led to a comprehensive document with 994 recommendations, which has been widely accepted and signed by nearly all political actors. It is interesting to note that the document's completion has seen a lot of hope and celebration to the extent of witnessing the return of even the most radical elements from abroad.

The National Umma Party (NUP) leader, Mr. El Sadig El-Mahdi, has returned to Khartoum from Cairo after years in exile. The former prime minister's return is also linked to the easing of political tensions in the Republic of Sudan after the promulgation of the National Document.

Going forward, the National Document should eventually set the stage for serious constitutional reforms in Sudan. To start with, as part of the preparatory phase, interim governance is being put in place.

The prime minister will be the leader of the government in Sudan. The appointment of General (rtd) Bakr Hassan Saleh has ushered in a new era with ministers expected to constitute a 50:50 arrangement between the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) and the opposition. In a landmark development, commentators are already calling for the inclusion of civil society representatives in the new government to maximize inclusion.

An amendment of the constitution in late 2016 is what sparked the reforms. The plan is that the PM leads a key role in Sudan's transition to a more democratic and more inclusive administration into the year 2020 when President Omar al-Bashir's final presidential tenure comes to an end.

Mr. al-Bashir (pictured) has indicated that he does not intend to extend his stay in power beyond this limit. Hence, for a stable and sustainable political transition, more constitutional changes are expected. The premier shall therefore play an important role in the management of the transition which required someone of his caliber, having been vice president and defence and interior minister in the past.

The Sudanese parliament of Sudan is currently debating recommendations of the National Document, and is also expected to adopt the "parity principle" between the ruling party and the opposition.



Sudan is relatively safer and more secure now than ever before, except only in areas that still have sporadic incidences of deviance such as Jebel Marra. Areas such as Darfur, which were once conflict hotspots, are increasingly becoming development discourse areas.

The future of Sudan now partly depends on sustenance of the commitment to democracy and dialogue internally as well as the international community's response to such developments in Khartoum. One wonders therefore, for instance, whether this is not the right time to lift the economic sanctions on Sudan to support transition. Already, the ongoing political transition has support from a few countries. Tanzania's plans to reopen its embassy in Khartoum after 31 years must serve as a significant step in this course.

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