

COMMITTEE OF THE CIVIL PROJECT IN SUDAN

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DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILISATION, REINTEGRATION AND THE RIGHTS OF FORMER COMBATANTS

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Introduction and Definition of the Problem

This paper does not discuss the future structure of the armed forces in Sudan. A future Transitional Government will have to decide whether there should be a unified national army, separate Northern and Southern armed forces, or some other arrangement. It will have to decide how to integrate the numerous military forces that are present in Sudan today. Whatever arrangement is decided upon, it will have to be closely associated with the process of disarmament and demobilisation, which must be considered very carefully.

The commonest cause of war in Africa is mutiny or insurrection by soldiers who feel betrayed or frustrated by the deal they have in a post-war settlement. A poorly handled disarmament and demobilisation process threatens discontent, unrest and violence. But allowing military forces to remain mobilised also has its dangers: they may destabilise a transition period, turn to crime, or contribute to factional or ethnic conflict. The effective disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of former soldiers, guerrillas, militiamen and security personnel will be one of the greatest challenges facing a Transitional Government, and the success or failure of the transition to peace and democracy may well hinge on how this process is handled.

This section defines the parameters of the problems under investigation.

Disarmament

Disarmament deals with the problem of getting armaments out of the hands of private individuals, especially demobilised combatants and former members of militias and security forces, so that the state can reassert its monopoly on the legitimate use of force.

Demobilisation

Demobilisation deals with how the excess number of former combatants, who cannot be absorbed into the new structure of the national armed forces, are to be dealt with. The combatants in question include the following categories:

1. Armies: Sudan armed forces (i.e. army, navy, airforce), SPLA, SAF, Beja Congress, Umma Liberation Army, SFDA, other NDA forces;
2. Militias: tribal militias and PDF;
3. Security forces of the regime (some of which have a quasi-autonomous status with private or party sources of finance);

4. Former liberation forces now aligned with the regime under the banner of the South Sudan Defence Force.

Spontaneous demobilisation occurs when combatants simply desert and return to their families. Many combatants who have been unwillingly conscripted will do this at the end of a war, particularly if they have only recently been recruited. Organised demobilisation usually involves the encampment of combatants, followed by their registration and disarmament, which is then followed by their rehabilitation or retraining and release. The longer soldiers have served, and the fewer non-military skills they have, the longer and more difficult the process of demobilisation will be.

Re-integration

The most substantive part of demobilisation is re-integration: what will former combatants do *after* they are demobilised? Will they go 'back' to rural life? Or will they be unemployed, with the risk of becoming criminals and future rebels? How should their re-entry into civilian life be facilitated? What education, employment, training, incentives etc., should they be given? There are various possibilities in terms of development and welfare programmes aimed specifically at demobbees, or the provision of special rights and incentives for demobbees (such as quotas for employers whereby a set percentage of people employed are former combatants). In many cases civilians will have negative attitudes towards former soldiers, therefore making former combatants socially accepted may be as important as providing economic opportunities.

Rights of former combatants

This follows on from re-integration. There are three main areas:

1. Former members of liberation forces: should they be given special privileges regarding employment, bank loans, etc?
2. Former members of Government armed forces and security organs: should they be deprived of any civil rights such as employment in government service or the right to travel?
3. Disabled former combatants and the widows and orphans of former combatants: should they be treated in a special manner?

Previous Experiences in Sudan

This section examines previous experiences with disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration in Sudan. There are important lessons to be learned from the Anya-nya and Ansar demobilisations. Some aspects of these demobilisations were successful, but there were major failures that contributed to repeated mutinies culminating in the outbreak of war in 1983 and the creation of militias.

Anyanya integration and demobilisation, 1972

Some problems with former Anya-nya combatants that surfaced during the implementation of the Addis Ababa Agreement had already been anticipated by those who were involved in making the agreement. In his book, Abel Alier pointed out

It has been observed that the organisation of internal security after so long a period of civil war was one of the most sensitive and intractable issues to be resolved during the negotiation at Addis Ababa. Neither side had confidence in the other. Rebel forces were not closely controlled or co-ordinated; the regular army opposing them, with a record of oppression and atrocity, were not trusted. It was therefore not surprising that the vital process of absorbing Anya-nya personnel into the national army was the most difficult task.¹

A peace agreement was reached in 1972 in Addis Ababa between the military Government and senior ex-officers of the Sudanese army in the Southern Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM). One of the most important provisions of the agreement was for the absorption of Anya-nya into the regular army, prison and police forces. 6,000 Anya-nya guerrillas were absorbed into the Sudanese armed forces, leaving 32,000 to be absorbed into civil jobs. According to Abel Alier, shortly before the agreement was signed, the number of Anya-nya forces swelled from about 12,000 to some 18,000 men. This included some civilians who joined the Anya-nya forces at the last moment, in the hope of getting a job in the regular forces, under the cover of the Anya-nya.

The Agreement provided for partial disarmament. Those who were absorbed retained their arms and equipment (except for limited replacements in their camps). Many refused to surrender their arms in exchange for arms given to them by the Sudan army which they considered inferior. Those who were not absorbed in the uniformed forces, were either compensated or were given their rifles back after they had been licensed. Although the government restricted the possession of arms, its security agents actually confiscated a lot of arms from northern traders who were smuggling them to western Sudan where the demand for arms was high. Also, the bodies of Sudanese army personnel who were sympathetic to their tribesmen fighting against the Dinka were found among militiamen killed during the fighting.

The Agreement was resented by some Anya-nya members, especially junior officers who joined the movement when they were students, and who were conscious of the motives of their opponents. Captain John Garang, then an Anya-nya officer and currently the SPLA/M Chairman, opposed the agreement and sent a message to the acting Anya-nya commander of Bahr el Ghazal and the commander of Lakes District, requesting them to disobey the cease-fire orders; but they disappointed him. Similarly, the Agreement was resented by many in the police and prison service who were recruited originally from the Northern Provinces following the mutiny in 1955. They resented it due to the material privileges they would lose if they were transferred to the north, including the 'security allowance,' Southern allowance, free food rations, occasional spoils of war and free housing.

As the implementation of the agreement proceeded, while the youngsters of the Anya-nya were unwilling and unmotivated, and while the northerners in police and prison forces were concerned about the privileges they would lose if they went to the North, the process of reintegration of ex-combatants became difficult, although it was kept under control for a short time. Violent incidents soon escalated. In one case, a northern policeman shot at a civilian in a dance place, that resulted in the village being deserted for 24 hours. In Wau, serious incidents occurred immediately after the Agreement. A Northern policeman shot civilian southerners in broad daylight in a crowded market place; a series of grenade

¹ Abel Alier, *Southern Sudan: Too many agreements dishonoured*, 1990.

explosions occurred in a cinema, bachelors' mess and the club of non-commissioned officers of the old forces, which killed one and wounded several others. Civilian and military absorbed Anya-nya were on the list of suspicious elements. At a later stage, Captain Agwet, an ex-Anya-nya, deserted a military barracks with his whole force and when his senior ex-Anya-nya officers tried to convince him to order his men to put down their weapons, he did the contrary and ordered his men to shoot them. They then crossed the border to a neighbouring country.

In addition to the above incidents, the wounds were not properly healed among the ex-Anya-nya soldiers who were absorbed into the national army: they resisted the policy of reintegration, not only with the national army in the South but also among themselves. Kapoeta's former Anya-nya battalion peacefully resisted their transfer to Rumbek which is a part of the South, as a result of a rumour that was circulated about a conspiracy to transfer them to Khartoum where they were likely to face disbandment and possibly even extermination. In Juba, they resisted leaving their temporary mud building for a new site. They had regarded it as a sort of trap, but their commander Major Cyrillo, who was an ex-government prison officer, said the orders must be obeyed. As a result he was arrested, tied down and beaten and his life was in a danger. Subsequently he was saved. In Upper Nile, although there were senior officers above him, Captain John Garang, courageously told the chairman of the Commission, who was responsible for recruiting the Anya-nya into the national army, that the troops in the province were not ready for the work of selection and absorption.

It should be noted that the Commission included ex-Anya-nya officers. While there was a great deal of goodwill and enthusiasm for the peace agreement, problems with important details laid the foundation for the subsequent unravelling of the peace agreement, and gave substance to the critique made by Dr John Garang, that the Addis Ababa agreement was a deal between the Southern and Northern 'bourgeoisified bureaucratic elites' and that the Northern elite dictated the terms while the Southern elite compromised the interest of the masses in return for jobs which had long been denied them. (SPLA Manifesto, 31 July 1983).

In addition, it has been argued that the agreement was made between the military government and some former Southern officers who had joined the rebellion, not for their nationalistic stand, but to escape the mass killing which was indiscriminately aimed at Southerners.

As the wounds began to heal, other problems cropped up:

1. Seniority and promotion of Anya-nya in the establishment of the officer cadre;
2. Camp conditions;
3. Poor transport and accommodation.

Although the absorbed officers had been commissioned in the SSLM on different dates, they were all considered as having been commissioned on the same day. (This arrangement however, was not applied to General Lagu who was commissioned alone at an earlier date.) To add more oil into fire, they were categorised as non-commissioned officers who could not progress beyond certain senior ranks. Because of this policy, some of them who were a good fighters were demoted from their bush ranks. Low levels of literacy were used to justify this policy.

As a result of this demotion, some of them mutinied and killed some of their colleagues both from the North and South. As recounted by Alier, 'One rainy evening, Sergeant Major Kwenen slipped away with some of his men and headed for Zeraf Island... He had been a major in the Anya-nya and was, according to his superiors, a good fighter. But

Kwenen could not read and write, and there were others more qualified than him.' These 'more qualified others' included students who joined Anya-nya during the absorption, hoping to benefit from the policy that gave an opportunity for all Southerners to join any uniformed forces should they meet the criteria of selection.

Similarly in Akobo, some of the officers and men in the absorbed forces mutinied. They attacked their colleagues from the old forces who were sleeping in the nearby garrison headquarters. Seven soldiers, all Northern Sudanese, died on the spot.

As regards the condition of the camps and other facilities, the absorbed forces seemed to believe that the old forces were receiving favoured treatment in transportation and accommodation. In addition, they experienced bad living conditions including food, medicine, clothes and sanitation facilities.

Many of the ex-combatants from the Anya-nya forces who were disqualified from the uniformed forces, perhaps due to health, education, age or even tribal reasons, were employed as wage earners in government establishments, for example in the wildlife department, as game scouts, and in local government, agriculture, forestry and fisheries, and road maintenance. As time passed, their arrears for salaries became greater and greater, although most of these departments were considered as productive sectors. For example, up to 1984/85 Equatoria operated a total of nine sawmills with a total production of sawn timber of 5,750 cubic metric tons valued at over 3 million Sudanese Pounds. This made the absorbed forces think that this was a deliberate policy from the Arab government in Khartoum to make them produce and then delay their salaries payments. What increased their anger was the corrupt practices of many senior officers both from the North and the South. The wildlife and forestry departments seemed to have been privatised in some way: some senior army officers just asked the heads of these departments to supply them with teak, mahogany woods, elephant tusks and rhino horn.

In 1974, the central government was unable to provide wages to ex-Anya-nya who were employed as labourers in labour-intensive projects. As a result they were laid off by the regional government and were guided to self-employment in farming since many of them could not return to their families and relatives for help in such a situation. The central government proposed to employ some of them in the sugar agro-industries of the Northern Sudan, rather than providing money to accelerate implementation of a Kenaf and two sugar projects in the South, that had the potential to absorb a labour force of 10,000. But the regional government thought this policy would have created more problems than it aimed to resolve. As a result they were returned to self-employment in farming and trade.

Some of those unemployed in this way reluctantly welcomed the dismissal and called upon their ancestors to let the war start again. So, when the elements of mutinous Anya-nya made a call for the struggle to continue, they were the first to join and laid the foundation for the Anya-nya II. But their senior officers who were satisfied with their posts and salaries remained behind, and started hunting them down when they realised that their lifeline was under threat.

Lack of counselling and training for former Anya-nya combatants can be counted as one of the reasons for the lack of interest in many jobs. For instance, it is not easy to convince a Dinka man to work as a carpenter or a fisherman. They believed carpentry is for non-Nilotics and fishing is for an *atuch* (which literally means someone who has no a cow, an inferior person). As for trade and agricultural opportunities, even if the ex-combatants had been interested in it, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to get loans because the trade was firmly controlled by the *jellaba* or Northern Sudanese traders, the credit conditions laid by the bank were very tough, tight conditions over collateral security often disqualified small farmers, and Southern Sudanese traders and the Regional Government through its co-

operatives favoured big traders. A *jellaba* trader remarked that their ‘Kuwait or Saudi Arabia is the South where they could make large profit in a short time through trade.’ So, it is hard to envisage how ex-combatants could be motivated to have an interest in employment in productive sectors without backing from the Regional Government.

As regards war wounded and disabled soldiers, they were demobilised into the department of social welfare. Their number was not very high, due to the limited usage of anti-personnel land mines. As the special fund ran out they were neglected, but because of deep-rooted social norms, they refrained from becoming armed bandits.

Ansar Returnees, 1976 and 1985

On 25 May 1969, the civilian government was overthrown, and the leaders of the democratic government were arrested. A Revolutionary Command Council was established and Nimeiri was elected as President and appointed as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces.

In March 1970, Imam el Hadi of the Ansar withdrawn to Gezira Aba in the White Nile and refused to go to Khartoum as Nimeiri requested him to do. Eventually he was attacked and at least twenty thousand Ansar were killed, but Imam escaped the death. As he was virtually unarmed with his Ansar followers, he decided to flee by road towards the Ethiopian border, but unfortunately his car was ambushed and he was killed, while most of the rest of his men managed to enter Ethiopia.

In Ethiopia the Ansar were trained militarily under the United National Front. They were armed and financed by the Ethiopian and Libyan governments with the aim of overthrowing the Nimeiri regime. Their number was estimated around 25,000 men (including foreigners—which was later denied). Sadiq el Mahdi joined them in the later stage and played a crucial role in the planning and the implementation stages of their invasion.

In August 1976 after they had attacked and entrenched themselves around the capital, the orders were given to shoot and in the process some two thousand Ansar were killed and the attempted coup collapsed. As a result of this failed coup, Nimeiri responded with extreme force. He purged the armed forces, by executions, dismissals, arrests: ninety-eight people were executed for their part in the rebellion and by the end of September Sadiq el Mahdi and Sherif el Hindi had been sentenced to death in absentia.

One of the outcomes of the abortive coup was to compel Sadiq and the other National Front leadership to admit that Nimeiri’s dictatorship could not be overthrown by force. Hence the national reconciliation that was reached in Port Sudan between Sadiq and Nimeiri against the opposition of many young Ansar and the whole bureaucracy of the Sudan Socialist Union including Bona Malwal, Abul Gassim Mohamed Ibrahim and others.

The reconciliation talks that brought the Ansar back to Sudan covered a wide range of issues that will be relevant to future a transition to democracy. These include the restoration of civil liberties, the restitution of confiscated property, the return of professionals to civil service positions, and the rehabilitation of areas of devastation (in this case, specifically Gezira Aba). One of the most pressing issues was the status of the returning Ansar fighters. The Ansar leadership pressed for a settlement similar to that made in 1972 with the Anyanya, which would have enabled most Ansar to be absorbed into the army, some of them taking high-ranking positions. Nimeiri, negotiating from a position of strength, insisted that the Ansar returnees be re-integrated into civilian life, primarily as farmers.

The restitution of property of Ansar leaders was one means used to assist the return and reintegration of Ansar fighters. Sayed Abdel Rahman al Mahdi had left his house in Khartoum as well as the Island of Aba to the Ansar. The Omdurman property was used as a hospital. In addition, development schemes were implemented and further schemes were

planned. Many Ansar were settled on farming schemes in southern Kordofan and southern Darfur, such as the Habila scheme. Unfortunately many of these farming projects were in marginal areas that suffered from drought and desertification especially in the 1980s. During the period 1978-85, Sadiq al Mahdi built up the Ansar financially and economically. The Sudan Government and Libya planned to finance a project which would settle 40,000 Ansar on 11,000 feddans of land at Gezira Aba. This co-operative would produce fruit and vegetables. Moreover, there were plans for further development of another 40,000 feddans in the White Nile area at a later date. However, it was alleged that those who immediately benefited from this project were those who had a zero distance from Mahdi's family, even including some who had never participated in the armed struggle against Nimeiri's regime.

In order to survive, most of the Ansar ex-combatants who were not settled in the productive projects ended up being supported by their families. Others were ashamed to go back to their relatives because they felt they would have been rejected by them. Others were left without livelihoods due to drought and economic crisis. Some of these frustrated, militarily trained men resorted to violent coping strategies. One of these strategies was attacking lorries in western Sudan and stealing passengers' properties; these individuals were known as 'gata el turuk' or bandits.

A second, equally violent and more politically destabilising coping strategy, was for ex-Ansar to mobilise themselves to fight as part of the Arab tribal militias against their Dinka neighbours over pasture and water resources. The old grievance over the alleged unequal treatment of the ex-Anya-nya versus the ex-Ansar came out: some Ansar militiamen justified their re-arming by claiming that ex-Anya-nya army units were fighting alongside the Dinka tribesmen in the inter-tribal conflicts. This group of ex-Ansar became prominent in the militia known as 'murahaleen', and the military training they had gained in Ethiopia and Libya benefitted the Baggara Arab militias a great deal, and made it difficult for community leaders on both sides of the conflict to find any lasting solution to the disputes.

Experiences of Other Countries

If we examine countries which have just emerged from civil strife, we will see that they have experienced many problems in the process of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants. These experiences are extremely valuable for Sudan.

In Somaliland, the war against the dictator Siad Barre ended in military victory for the opposition in 1991. The northern part of the country broke away shortly afterwards to form the Republic of Somaliland. It was the only part of Somalia with a workable administration, and one of the main tasks was dealing with the legacy of the war. In 1993, the parliament and the government recognised the need for demobilisation and disarmament of ex-combatants and clan militias. Their stated programme objectives among others included:

1. Rehabilitating Somali National Movement (SNM) veterans, clan militiamen and those manning illegal road controls into gainful employment, which could contribute to socio-economic development of the country;
2. Enhancing security by making settlements free of gun-toting youths;
3. Training these youths for various security maintenance activities;
4. Enabling trainees to acquire a variety of marketable skills.

Unfortunately, at the time, the conditions for the successful implementation of these important operations were simply not there. The international community was very slow in responding to the needs. Trainees lived under deprived conditions devoid of most of the

minimum requirements for a meaningful training. They had no roof over their heads, no utensils to eat with or to use to cook the food donated to them, no health facilities, no bedding, no recreational facilities or proper playing grounds. In addition, the training content was neither stimulating nor did it enable trainees to acquire useful skills. As a result it failed. Before training ended, the majority of the trainees packed their few belongings in a plastic bag and moved to the capital, while some took advantage of the chaotic situation and started looting the food and drugs, and others drove away the camels which were to be slaughtered for them.

In Mozambique, in 1992 a General Peace Agreement was signed and the signatories undertook to do everything within their power to achieve genuine national reconciliation. A detailed timetable and process for the economic and social reintegration of demobilised soldiers was included in one of the protocols. The scale and logistical complexity of the task was considerable in spite of the improved quantity and quality of resources: the lack of initial reliable data concerning numbers, and the disparities between the estimates of various 'authoritative' agencies had complicated the programme.

Ex-combatants who had been processed through demobilisation, were transported with their dependants to the home areas of their choice, after they had been provided with two sets of civilian clothes, seeds and agricultural tools. Later on as most of them were unable to find work in their places of origins, they began to flow to the main population centres in search of work, but unfortunately employment for unskilled ex-soldiers was lacking in Mozambique's cities. They have eventually been implicated in increasing urban armed robbery. Moreover, teenage veterans integrated into the new army seized hostages, shot up the local town market, and only returned to barracks after being promised better pay.

In Uganda, in recognition of the complex administrative requirements for demobilisation and reintegration programme, the projects were planned in advance, but it ended up with 32,000 ex-combatants claim eligibility instead of the expected 16,000.

In Ethiopia, as Mengistu's government collapsed, the former army was completely disbanded and replaced by the victorious EPRDF. The demobilisation of the defeated army, more than 400,000 strong, was undertaken jointly by the incoming government and the ICRC. It included airlifting some troops who had fled to Sudan. A large proportion of the former army, especially those who had been forcibly conscripted in the final months of the war, simply deserted and went back to their families. Finding gainful opportunities for the several hundred thousand others was much more difficult, and in practice many of them were simply given modest rations, new clothes, and discharged. Many of those who had been in the army for a long time, or who were ill or disabled, were soon afterwards seen begging on the streets of large towns. Others were blamed for a crime wave that struck the country. Many sold their arms to traders who shipped them to Somalia. The government also accused the OLF, which soon left the governing alliance and formed an opposition, of recruiting many former servicemen to its own forces.

After a year, some of the EPRDF were demobilised and some from other liberation fronts (especially the OLF) were absorbed into the new national army; later some members of the former national army were absorbed after screening. However, problems remain including resentment among demobilised ex-OLF and the ethnic imbalance in the current national army which is dominated by Tigrayans.

As far as the donor community is concerned, most of them are reluctant to provide financing to demobilisation and reintegration programmes, unless governments have demonstrated their commitment to the programme. For example, in Chad, the French and Chadian military planners designed the demobilisation and reintegration programme, and hoped that civilian authorities would later develop appropriate reintegration projects and

secure funding from donors, but the project fell behind schedule in part because of the time required to set up the administrative structures and payment mechanism.

Donors also have noted that the military personnel were slow in providing the necessary information to civilian authorities on the profile of the ex-combatants to be demobilised and their intended place of origin. But they were equally employing a wait-and-see approach; waiting to see whether demobilisation progress was on the right track and what form it would take before investing staff time and risking funds to design and implement a reintegration programme.

The Current Situation in Sudan

The present situation in the Sudan is more complex than any of those considered above. Unlike the problem of the North versus the South in the first Sudanese conflict, the present war is complex in nature: The NIF government which came to power with its Islamic agenda, also calling for unity of the country has now tactically signed military pacts with splinter groups from SPLM, which are calling for separating the South from the North, but probably without any sincerity. Equally, the traditional parties which were in power until 1989, and which have a history that includes dishonouring a number of agreements made with the South (including the promise of a federal arrangement after independence), have signed another agreement with the SPLM under the umbrella of the NDA.

All these forces have their own armies and militia, and goals they want to achieve in Sudan. The NIF government wants to establish a fully-fledged Islamic state in the Sudan, and has over the years expressed its intent expand its Islamic programme in north-east Africa. Islamic social programme aims to achieve, among other things, the reconstruction of all state institutions on principles derived from the Koran. As a result of this intent, Islamic NGOs have been set up to implement this programme by encouraging, and occasionally enforcing, the spread of Islam. The Islamic agencies are active in most parts of the country.

On the other hand, the SPLA with other NDA forces see it a priority to overthrow the NIF. To achieve this goal, all groups under NDA are being trained and armed, increasing the number of armed groups.

The Militarisation of Society

The NIF government has tried to condition the mentality of traditional leaders to become militarised, and mobilise their people into pro-government militias. Many sections of Sudanese society are now armed, mostly in the Popular Defence Forces. Most citizens have ready access to firearms.

The culture of violence and resolving problems by the use of force alone has also become embedded in Sudanese society. Throughout large swathes of Sudan, merchants must carry guns to defend themselves from armed bandits. 'Kalash bijiib kash' is a motto heard in western Sudan. Inter-tribal disputes that would earlier have been resolved peacefully, or would at worst have deteriorated to fights with swords and spears, are now likely to involve militiamen armed with modern weapons. In another example, at the Abuja peace talks, the NIF government made it clear to the SPLM/A delegation that the exercise of self-determination they are asking for, should not be considered as a free gift: rather it could only be obtained through the barrel of the gun. When the Government delegates were asked about the possibility of negotiating with the other Northern political parties, they replied that they did not negotiate with the people who are without guns. In other words, the only language they understood is the language of the gun.

The religious-political extremism of some NIF members also stands in the way of a culture of non-violence. Some NIF leaders have resisted a non-violent settlement, saying that if they die they will just go and enter into paradise, since they carry along with them the key to heaven's door. Moreover, in the Nairobi peace talks, their representative echoed the same position, but this time in order to shorten the distance to the heaven, they declared that for the SPLA/M delegation to enjoy the fruits of self-determination it would have to be over their dead bodies!

As a result, the Northern forces in the NDA also resorted to armed struggle, trying to achieve by force what they had failed to get through political struggle.

The major part of the SPLA is determined to achieve the goal of liberation, as peaceful action from the Southerners has always been rejected in the past. The SPLA dedication to a military solution is reflected in some of their songs. In one, the fighting forces are telling their leader that there is no room for a political solution this time, but a military solution is the option, 'so you better get us guns and other military equipment to fight the war of the liberation. If people are worried about our death, we do not fear death and this is why we have left Bahr el Ghazal.' This socialisation into militarism has helped the SPLA endure many years of warfare, but could prove a problem in the post-war phase.

Who are the combatants?

Before a proper survey is undertaken, we cannot know for sure who are the combatants, and what their aspirations are. But a cursory examination of some of the SPLA soldiers reveals that there is a core of former army officers, and a larger number of youths who have subsequently joined. The youths joined mainly because they were frustrated with their opportunities: schools were closed, farmland was seized, and they experienced discrimination and limited employment chances in towns.

The implications of this are that many soldiers will not be happy to resume civilian life as poorly-educated people with very limited opportunities. They will not be happy as low-paid labourers on construction sites and mechanised farms. They took up arms in the hope of gaining more. One young soldier in the Nuba Mountains pointedly said:

I want to go back to school, even before freedom is achieved. I don't mind what subject. I am still ignorant. Education will make me more aware of my environment, so I can make others more aware too.

If I can't get these things, then we will have achieved nothing.

There is no need for me to put down my arms until I see the guarantee for education.

Most SPLA combatants in Southern Sudan joined for similar reasons. Many interrupted their schooling to join the Movement. Others were farmers and herders without any formal education. As the war has gone on, many of the more experienced veteran fighters have spontaneously demobilised. Most of them have taken up opportunities in trade. Those who remain are mostly younger men who grew up during the war itself and who have had little experience of normal civilian life. Ad hoc surveys suggest that these fighters do not intend to become farmers and cattle herders once again. Instead, they anticipate either staying in the armed forces, or taking a government position, or entering trade, or continuing with their education. Settlement back into rural life is not considered an attractive option.

Likely Scenarios and Problems

Many of the likely problems can be adduced from the former experience of Sudan and other countries, but the case of Sudan is probably more complicated than any of them because of the large number of armed groups and their extremely complicated political and military relationships.

It is essential for the Transitional Government to have its own demobilisation, disarmament and re-integration plan. There is a danger that an ad hoc plan may be inadequately thought out. Alternatively, western donors--whose financial assistance will certainly be needed--may impose their own priorities on the programme, which may not suit the needs of Sudan. Those responsible for disarmament and demobilisation must take advice from technical experts, but the final decisions must be governed by political agreements and human rights principles.

Major problems include the following:

The Need for Research into the Combatants:

Currently there is a striking lack of knowledge about how many combatants there are, what are their backgrounds, skills and aspirations. Basic information and answers to these questions is an essential requirement for any kind of planning process.

There is a need to conduct a survey of numbers of combatants and a more detailed survey of their skills, aspirations and background. Precise details of numbers will be considered as sensitive security information so it is likely that only approximate figures can be obtained. But it should be possible to undertake a more detailed study into the backgrounds and aspirations of a random sample of combatants, which will provide essential information for planning purposes.

What are the Weapons? How to Disarm?

Currently there is a lack of knowledge about how many arms are circulating in Sudan and what policy could be used to reclaim them. Some proposals for consideration include the following:

1. Disarmament should be voluntary as far as possible. Those who wish to leave their weapons and return to civilian life should be encouraged to do so at the earliest opportunity.
2. For confidence-building the a substantial core of SPLA forces could be allowed to possess their weapons during the transitional period, especially on cross-border areas adjoining the North.
3. It will be possible at some time in future to pass a law forbidding the carrying of weapons in cities.
4. For the NIF militia and security forces, they should surrender their weapons unconditionally to the Transitional Government.
5. An arms buy-back policy should be discouraged and instead an arms compensation policy for personal weapons for the New Sudan forces should be encouraged.

New armed forces:

There is a lack of detail about what will be the future status of the various armed forces, including militia, and about how many can be absorbed into new army/armies, police, prison service etc.

It is important that the transitional government form a clear policy on the new national army, and decides what becomes of the militias and other forces.

Encampment:

Requirements for encamping demobilising soldiers are currently not known and not planned for. If the war is concluded by agreement, all sides will be required to encamp many of their troops. If one side is victorious, defeated soldiers should report to assembly points, where they could be transported to camps. Subsequently, demobilising combatants from the victorious forces should also be encamped. In all cases, adequate food, clothing, shelter and medical care must be made available in camps before they are being transported.

Where possible, encampment should be quick and voluntary. But encampment in ill-prepared sites, where demobbees are not properly looked after and where their future is uncertain, will lead to a feeling of discontent and result in more problems than it solves.

Practicalities of Re-integration:

Re-integration requires an overall strategy, means for practical assistance, and a legal or administrative framework.

The first steps in drawing up the strategy are to assess the requirements for education, training, employment and credit. Also it is essential to decide upon the plans for the rights and privileges of former combatants.

Some may argue that demobilised former combatants and their families should be considered as a vulnerable group and need target programmes in productive non-military activity. However, others believe that giving such projects wider scope is also important because otherwise there will be a problem of community resentment against the targeted groups for their perceived privileged position. It may be better to insist on quotas for employers to take on former combatants.

As far as education is concerned, government may find it in its interest to provide former combatants with the opportunity to complete their formal education. In the short term, this could reduce pressure on job market by keeping them in school, but in the longer term, the educational level of the workforce will be enhanced.

Despite the fact that the government may do its utmost to generate employment, many demobbees are nevertheless going to be under serious economic pressure for some time to come. So it would be a potential pain-killer to employ unskilled demobbees in projects such as roads maintenance and building etc.

Funding demobilisation and reintegration will be a major challenge. Some circles within the opposition assume that the technical and financial assistance for programmes for demobilised ex-combatants and displaced persons into the civilian economy and society, will automatically be met by the international community and donors. This is unlikely to happen quickly.

Special rights for former combatants:

There is a practical argument for giving special rights to former combatants, because a frustrated demobilized officer may have high aspirations, and he may even become a potential coup-maker. In Angola for example, the choice had been to cajole them with money, thereby softening their potential discontent. However, some may argue that as the new government may not be able to compensate potential coup-makers, the alternative is to ban or imprison potentially rebellious leaders and officers.

Political realities mean that different rights will be extended to different groups of former combatants, depending on the outcome of the war. Armed groups will enter negotiations only on the basis of securing their own position. If the current Sudan armed forces are wholly defeated, a Transitional Government will have to decide whether to be magnanimous or punitive, or whether to be selective in its treatment of the defeated soldiers. If there is a negotiated settlement, selective amnesties will have to be negotiated along with selective privileges for demobbees.

Special needs of child soldiers and unaccompanied children in the war zones:

It will be important to offer education and other projects for children caught up in the war. Child soldiers conscripted into the military even before adolescence should be given priority treatment, since they have little recollection of life outside of the military, have spent their productive lives in the guerrilla army, and lack the social skills to obtain jobs. They may also need special counselling. Experiences with rehabilitating child soldiers in Liberia and Sierra Leone may be relevant here.

Security Problems:

It is certain that security problems will arise during demobilisation. The question is not if there will be incidents of violence, perhaps even including mutinies, but when they will occur and how serious they will be. One type includes crimes carried out by demobbees possibly against the urban 'parasitic upper class', and armed banditry in rural areas. A second problem will be the possibility of destabilisation and sabotage by former security officers currently in the Government's specialist security services. A third will be mutinies/rebellions by units that think they are being treated unfairly. This is the most serious for the political future and human rights in Sudan. Overall it will be helpful if the demobilisation process is made as voluntary and participatory as possible, with good information passed to all involved to allay their fears. A close study of previous attempts at post-war disarmament in Sudan will allow some of these eventualities to be anticipated.

Although the SPLM/A has initiated a demobilisation programme in the areas it controls as a means of preparing former combatants to be self-reliant, one must anticipate fierce resistance and violence during the demobilisation and disarmament process after the final peace settlement is reached. No demobilisation and disarmament in history has been achieved without violence and often large-scale mutiny. In the short term there will be a deterioration in security due to this.

What will happen when there is a mutiny, when a certain group refuses to disarm, having previously agreed but is so discontented with the agreement that its frustrations cannot be contained? Will the Transitional Government use force or negotiation? We have no ready answers for the above questions, but we pose the questions.

Tribal militias:

Tribal militias and the anti-SPLA southern forces will probably refuse to disarm unless inter-tribal disputes are resolved and the various tribes have guarantees of their security and rights. This will require attention to local government and dispute resolution mechanisms.

Treatment of former NIF combatants:

Members of former NIF security organs and militarised political organs will need to be disarmed and demobilised. Unless the current Sudan Government is defeated on the battlefield, there will have to be some process of negotiation for these people to demobilise. Their anti-democratic orientation makes them a difficult and dangerous force with a serious potential for destabilising the transition. They will need to be re-oriented towards democratic pluralism.

Need for a comprehensive plan:

This paper has summarised some of the many issues that will face Sudan when it tries to move from war to peace. These issues are many and complex. They are also critical for the success of the war-peace transition. It will be important for a peace settlement to include the outlines of a comprehensive plan for disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration. This plan will need to be developed and detailed in the period immediately after agreement is reached.

Conclusion

The disarmament and demobilisation of former combatants is one of the most important tasks in a coming transition. It will be a sensitive process, which is bound to be beset by problems, some of which have the potential for creating serious security challenges to the transitional government. For this reason it must be meticulously planned.

Foreign donors who are concerned with a successful transition to peace and democracy in Sudan must bear this in mind. Ample funding for programmes of disarmament, demobilisation, the reintegration of former combatants and the protection of their rights, should be a priority during the transition and afterwards. In addition, we can only expect former combatants to successfully re-integrate into civilian life in the context of a growing economy with job opportunities. Unless these challenges are met, the transition is likely to be fraught with difficulties and dangers. If they are met, there will be real hopes for peace and democracy in Sudan.