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***Independence in Southern Sudan***

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***Prompt:*** The Declaration of Independence states: "When in the course of human

events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bonds which connect them with another and to assume . . . the separate and equal station . . . entitled to them. . . ." Analyze the relevance of this aspiration in the world today and whether it is a relic of the past or not. Consider whether minority groups, nations, and peoples exist today that are deserving of separation, who they might be and what should be the response of the United States and the international community in supporting their desires for independence.

When contemporary Americans read the words, "When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bonds which connect them with another and to assume...the separate and equal station...entitled to them," strong emotions are brought to memory as they remember the humble beginnings of a nation that came to be great. The American Declaration of Independence is a success story that they remember every year with unanimous joy on the very day those words were signed. Consequently, remembering those words may cause America's citizens to believe that any people seeking liberation from oppression anywhere in the world will also experience the exhilaration of freedom as they become willing to take up arms against the powers that oppress them. While the inhabitants of Southern Sudan certainly feel the oppression of the Government of Sudan (GOS) in the North, the dynamics of their situation are much different than those that precipitated the American Revolution. In contrast to America, a southern Sudanese declaration of independence would not be successful and would worsen what is already considered the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. Therefore, in analyzing the relevance of the words found in the Declaration of Independence in the contemporary world, it is important that the particulars of the situation are considered before the principles contained therein are haphazardly applied to any conflict in the world today. This essay will compare the similarities and differences of the situation that confronted the American Colonists with the situation that confronts the inhabitants of southern Sudan today. The paper will further serve to suggest what role the United States and other members of the

international community can play to foster a just peace between north and south Sudan.

Southern Sudan is much closer to northern Sudan than the American Colonies were to Britain. This geographical fact gave the American Revolutionaries a considerable advantage over the plight of southern rebels in the Sudan. The British were dependent on American colonists for the housing and feeding of their troops and could only feasibly supply them every once in a while. Any hopes the southern Sudanese have of winning the struggle against the north through a war of attrition are indeed consigning themselves to a long and drawn-out conflict that has little chance of success. Recent oil discoveries in the south compound this problem and will be discussed later. Moreover, British parliamentary officials who were responsible for the colonial policy that led to the revolution were generally ignorant of ground level facts about America.<sup>1</sup> This made them out of touch with the public reaction to their policies, and less capable of mounting a military campaign against rebellious colonists. In contrast, the Sudanese leaders that implemented the Arabization and Islamization policies that sparked civil war in Sudan were closer and more aware of the conditions in southern Sudan. Any ignorance they may have had concerning public reaction to their policies in the south were certainly made clear to them through facts and pressure given to the GOS by international organizations and by countries of the international community. In conclusion, the geographical proximity of southern Sudan to northern Sudan makes an American-style declaration of independence less likely to result successfully in that country.

Another reason that makes southern Sudan's hope of succession from the north highly unlikely are the recent oil discoveries found in the south. While claiming these resources for themselves offers bright economic hopes for an independent state in southern Sudan, the government in Khartoum that controls the contracts for drilling in these oil fields will not concede such a profitable enterprise to a portion of its population it believes it can subdue militarily. The American colonies were indeed a profitable enterprise to Great Britain as well, but the British crown showed significantly less determination to hold on to these economic benefits in the face of popular discontent. Despite the fact that England's national debt had doubled between 1754 and 1763, King George III proved he was willing to accept the succession of the colonies in a statement he made following the Boston Tea party. When angry colonists defied the British attempt to economically subdue them under the Tea Act and overturned hundreds of tea chests into the Boston Harbor, George III said, "We must master them or totally leave them to themselves."<sup>2</sup> If the civil disobedience manifested by the colonists angered King George III enough that he was willing to live with the possibility of independent American colonies, we can see that the determination of the government in Khartoum to hold on to the south is something much stronger. So far the GOS has been willing to continue their military campaigns against peoples in the southern regions despite extraordinary numbers of deaths, widespread reports of rape, the re-institution of slavery and intense international pressure. This comparison to the American situation

reveals that the GOS is an entirely different type of government than was the British crown; not only tyrannical, but totally inhumane.

So we begin to see a sad truth that settles over the situation in southern Sudan; that while it is many times more difficult that southern Sudan can succeed in declaring their independence from the North, their situation is infinitely more urgent than the one faced by American colonists in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Civil war between north and south in Sudan has long been a conflict to plague the nation. However, its most recent eruption began in 1983 when the government started a campaign of Islamization and imposed Islamic law upon the all areas of the country. The chief legal advocate of this measure was Hasan al-Turabi, acting as Attorney General to President Nimeiri.<sup>3</sup> Hasan al-Turabi continued to pursue this policy in the ensuing years, especially during his rise to the head of the Sudanese government with the military backing of General Omar al-Bashir. Educated in England and at the Sorbonne, Hasan al-Turabi speaks a multiplicity of languages with great fluidity and is thoroughly familiar with Western philosophical constructs of Cartesian logic and August Comte's positivism.<sup>4</sup> Notwithstanding his familiarity with modern thought, his commitment to radical Islam is undeniable as it was under his administration that Osama bin Laden enjoyed substantial freedom in the country to set up a wide array of terrorist training camps that were responsible for numerous terrorist operations, most notably the 1998 bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and an assassination attempt on President Mubarak of Egypt in Ethiopia. If Turabi were in front of us today, he would surely be capable of impressing us with his words

and ideology in terms that any Westerner could understand and agree with. He couches the challenge that modernity presents to Muslims in terms of *ibtala*, a challenge posed by God to test Muslim's faith. He would argue that just as the Prophet Muhammad used ancient Arabic idioms to preach monotheism and undermine Arabic idolatry, so too must Muslims today engage modern concepts to more effectively spread the cause of Islam in the modern world. He includes in this process the opening of the gate of *ijtihad* (interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence) and selective obedience to the *salaf* (the historical practice of preceding generations of Muslims).<sup>5</sup> The combination of these aspects of al-Turabi have created a popular joke among Sudanese that says that "there are two Hasan al-Turabis, one for export, and another for local consumption." The sharp contrast between what Turabi says in public and what actually gets put into practice was evident in the preamble to the Islamic Constitution drafted by Turabi's political party. It presents the implementation of Islamic law as the answer to all of Sudan's problems; something that Muslims and non-Muslims, Arabs and non-Arabs can welcome. It guarantees the basic freedoms of life without discrimination and the sanctity of the home of all citizens.<sup>6</sup> Both these claims have been denied to Christian, Pagan and Muslim populations in various areas throughout Sudan, most recently evidenced by continued violence in the Darfur region. Despite attacks by rebel groups in Darfur, the Arab Militias of Sudan that operate under support by the GOS have responded in an inhumane manner, far outstretching the ostensible commitments to humanitarian practices set forth in the Islamic constitution. Although Hasan al-Turabi is currently in jail

because of severed relations with General Omar al-Bashir, the pattern of falling far short of political promises to the people of Sudan has continued with the administration of the current president.

Despite the bleak facts that surround the conflict in Sudan, southern Sudanese, represented by John Garang and the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement and the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLM/A) best hope for peace lies in their willingness to engage in peace talks with the GOS. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), an independent institution focusing on public policy issues, was commissioned by the U.S. Institute of Peace to put together a report revitalizing the issue of U.S.-Sudan relations to make pragmatic recommendations to the U.S. Administration. The report stated that since 1998, oil production has shifted the balance of power in the Sudan in favor of the North and that the SPLM/A would ensure the best future for itself and its people by demonstrating willingness to participate in a scenario characterized as "One Sudan/ Two Systems."<sup>6</sup> They argue that if the southern Sudanese prolong a war that they are unable to win, they will be forced to bargain from an even weaker position and be less able to guarantee the freedoms they desire. The SPLM/A and the GOS have engaged each other in various diplomatic efforts that have yielded several victories that the SPLM/A and the members of the International community can use in further negotiations with the north. In 1997, the north accepted for the first time the Declaration of Principles (DOP), an achievement by the IGAD (Inter-Governmental Authority on Development in the Horn of Africa), that supports the right of the southern Sudanese to self-determination

with emphasis on national unity. In addition to this achievement, the SPLM/A and the GOS entered talks in May, 2004 in Naivasha, Kenya. The talks produced the Protocol for the Resolution of Conflict in Southern Kordofan/Nuba Mountains and the Blue Nile States. The principles contained therein were agreed upon and made available to the public. The provisions of the protocol include the establishment of independent Judiciary, Legislative and executive branches of Government in the said areas, appropriation of funds to repair the damage done in the war-torn areas, a 45%/55% SPLM/National Congress Party power sharing schema in the national government and a fair distribution of oil revenues between the northern and southern governments.<sup>7</sup> These two diplomatic achievements are significant victories and tools that the SPLM/A can use to shift its focus from military resistance to diplomatic negotiations.

The international community and the United States government have considerable leverage in the success of continued peace talks in the Sudan. Sudan suffers considerably without diplomatic ties to the United States and the European Union. The U.S. national interest in Sudan is great and based on humanitarian grounds and continued allegations that Sudan is a hotbed for international terrorism. Its important location in the volatile horn of Africa heightens the importance of the latter concern. The United States government cannot afford to ignore recent events in the Sudan and should pursue as its prime goal the establishment of peace between northern and southern Sudan. The principal policy recommendation by the CSIS task force was for the U.S. government to pursue a multinational, diplomatic effort with the sole objective of

ending the war in Sudan.<sup>8</sup> In consideration of these facts the SPLM/A's best chance for success is to capitalize off the interest both the U.S. and the international community has in establishing peace in the region. If religious and ethnic cooperation is achieved in the country, its example can serve as model for the rest of the world as to the practices and policies that work to bring about peace between Muslims and non-Muslims, and Arabs and non-Arabs. Not only southern Sudanese have a responsibility in this effort, but so does the rest of the world. The challenge of the southern Sudanese will be one of patience to pool the support and efforts of other nations and not take matters into their own hands, while the challenge of the rest of the world will be to stay the course of continued support to oppressed peoples in the face of temptations to forget the problems of others.

As shown throughout this paper, the American Declaration of Independence does not serve as a model for peace and liberation in southern Sudan. Although the predicament in Sudan is much more urgent than that of the American colonists, the geographic particulars of the situation in Sudan and the International community's interest in the region make diplomatic efforts for peace the most viable and least costly alternatives to war. The ideals embodied in the Declaration of Independence are encouraging to Americans, yet applying them to other countries across the board will not guarantee the freedoms of Americans to everyone that attempts to repeat their experience. The most positive prospects for peace and freedom in Sudan lie in diplomatic efforts on the part of its own citizens and sincere efforts on the part of the U.S. government and the

international community. Such efforts will yield the best results for Sudan and the rest of the world as their success will manifest an important victory in religious and ethnic cooperation across lines of difference.

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5. *Ibid.*, 201-202.
6. El-Affendi, Abdelwahab. *Turabi's Revolution: Islam and Power in Sudan.* London: Grey Seal Books, 1991 157
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