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## Sudan: On Confusion

By [Alex de Waal](#)

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A senior member of a Sudanese opposition party was present at the meeting of the leaders of the Juba Alliance in which the issue of boycotting the elections was discussed at length. From the meeting he knew precisely where each of the parties stood: which were for contesting the elections, which were for comprehensive boycott, and which were for partial boycott or were undecided. In the circumstances, his information was as precise, accurate, and up to date as any.

On leaving the meeting he saw the BBC news, which was reporting a comprehensive boycott. This threw him into confusion. Assuming that the BBC had better information than he did, he also reported the BBC's report as fact. The BBC report was actually inaccurate.

The last 72 hours have been characterized by confusion, conflicting information and shifting positions. It has not been helped by the fact that some political leaders express different opinions to different audiences, changing their language and emphasis, sometimes by the hour. Few of the political parties have sufficient internal discipline for all their spokesmen to give the same message, so that depending on who is speaking a different story emerges. There is a vast amount of rumour and inference.

A general rule for the current situation is that those who know most speak least, and those who are appearing most frequently in the media, usually know less.

In these circumstances, news reports and the publications by international groups often carry unwarranted weight. The position of the U.S. has been very clear: it wants the election to proceed. But some political leaders, particularly at the second level, take reports of non-governmental organizations, which are taking a principled stand against the elections, as indicative of what the international community will do.

Finding the truth is always hard in the Sudanese political scene. At the moment it is simply impossible.

### COMMENTS

Khalid AlMubarak [4 April, 2010 at 03:35](#)

I do not write ONLY in my official capacity. I write as one of the most active opposition advocates abroad for more than twelve years .I called for pluralism, campaigned for multiculturalism, democracy and human rights. I supported the CPA as someone who yearned for it and worked for it. I and my family paid a price for that. That is why I take the CPA seriously. Dr John Garang took it seriously; but after his death some of his SPLM successors began to look upon the CPA as a Trojan horse ;or a mere trick to topple the regime from inside. That led them to an alliance with parties, which rejected the CPA in 05. They thought that the SPLM and Garang betrayed them in 05 and tried to bring the movement back to the fold. When they found a sympathetic ear, a situation was created in which the SPLM became both part of government and opposition. This is the cause of chaos and confusion. To its credit the WEST still takes the CPA seriously.

As far as Darfur is concerned, the rebels should not have a de facto veto over the political process. SPLM never had a veto when elections were held in Sudan during the civil war. Elections were held in Iraq and Afghanistan during conflict. Besides, even the most vociferous opponents of Sudan in the USA (those who swallowed “Prendergastisms” without reservations in the past) have had the probity to acknowledge that the situation in Darfur had changed. You are right about the Nuba Mountains and other areas; but there is room in the CPA for that too. Postponement of the referendum is, theoretically, an idea to be discussed; but in the real world of practical politics, it is a non-starter because of the atmosphere of mistrust and the huge emotional capital injected in the cause of self-determination over many years.

**The USA was right about the ICC. It feared politicisation and did not like the unlimited powers of an unaccountable Prosecutor. Both factors are clear in the performance of the court and its prosecutor (who – incidentally – opposes elections in Sudan!). I was impressed by what the Austrian philosopher Hans Kochler said in London last week about the impossibility of separating power politics from attempts of international justice. Only weak states can be targeted. The big fishes will get away with murder and enjoy impunity. Dr Kochler noted that by opposing elections L. M. Ocampo has strayed away from his main duty. He should have submitted his case and kept silent except in the court. Instead, he has become a celebrity, and an activist who holds press conferences and mobilises the media. His credibility has plummeted.**