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Report Summary

Key leaders of north and south Sudan promised Friday to ensure that next January's planned referendum on independence for the southern region will go forward peacefully and on time. The pledges came at a meeting at the United Nations attended by world leaders, including U.S. President Barack Obama. Mr. Obama's presence at the U.N meeting underscored the deep concern in Washington that Sudan's north-south peace process will derail unless the referendum goes ahead as planned without violence.

The United States is urging Sudan to meet its obligations under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and hold a referendum on-time that could see the South of the country secede from the North, otherwise, Khartoum could face new sanctions. Western diplomats at the United Nations have in recent weeks expressed concern. They worry that a postponed vote, or one that is seen to not have a credible result, could throw the country back into violence.

U.S. President Barack Obama will attend a high-level meeting on Sudan Friday at the United Nations. Hosted by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and bringing together senior Western and African officials, the meeting is intended to focus international attention on Sudan in the lead-up to the January referendum which is likely to see Southern Sudan vote to secede from the North. There are growing international fears that if the January vote does not go ahead on schedule there could be violence, especially if the south were to unilaterally declare its independence. But they also worry that even if the

referendum is held on time and the outcome is not respected or seen to not be credible that could also push the country back into another bloody civil war.

The Sudanese authorities must halt the harassment and intimidation of journalists in the run up to the referendum on southern independence in January 2011, Amnesty International said in a press release today. "No credible poll can be conducted in an environment where freedom of speech is being so openly violated," said Rania Rajji, Amnesty International's Sudan researcher. "The governments of north and south Sudan must ensure the vote is held in an atmosphere where all Sudanese can freely express their views and halt any further restrictions to freedom of expression".

The chairman of the Somali concerned group, an advocacy organization based in London has demanded the resignation of President Sheik Sharif Sheikh Ahmed after accusing the beleaguered leader of failing to meet the aspirations of Somalis. Mohamud Gure, a former lecture at the Somalia National University said the government has failed to live up to its constitutional mandate to protect ordinary unarmed Somalis by losing ground to hard line Islamist insurgents such as al-Shabab.

New clashes in Somalia's capital, Mogadishu, between government troops and Islamist insurgents have killed at least 20 people and wounded at least 68 others. Medics say most of the dead are civilians. Militant group al-Shabab launched an offensive exactly one month ago in an effort to topple the government.

The head of Britain's security services has said al-Qaida plots targeting Britain are increasingly originating from Somalia and Yemen. Just a few years ago, he said, 75 percent of suspected terror threats were originating from northwest Pakistan, but today that percentage has dropped to 50 percent. Now, he said, the threat to Britain's security is increasingly coming from elsewhere, namely from the African countries Yemen and Somalia.

The US wants to strengthen its ties with Somalia's breakaway region Somaliland and semi-autonomous region of Puntland. The Obama administration's top diplomat for Africa has said. The new, "aggressive" engagement could help to head off the Islamist insurgents, Johnnie Carson said. The assistant secretary of state for Africa said the US would send more aid workers and diplomats to Puntland and Somaliland and support the governments of both regions, in the north of Somalia, with development projects.

Somalia's president has urged the international community to address threats posed by the Somali terrorist group al-Shabab. Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed told world leaders at the U.N. General Assembly Saturday that any delay in addressing this "clear and present danger" would prolong regional instability and international terrorism. He called on the U.N. Security Council to pass a resolution aimed at deterring the spread of al-Qaida terrorists and their "homegrown" affiliates such as al-Shabab.

Eritrea is at risk of becoming a failed state, according to a new report from the [International Crisis Group](#). It says internal repression coupled with international military conflict means the country is becoming increasingly isolated in the Horn of Africa. The report says Eritrea jails are full of political prisoners, journalists, and religious dissidents who are regularly targeted by the state. The report says Eritrea has fought either directly or indirectly with Ethiopia, Yemen, Djibouti, and Sudan and been involved in conflicts in eastern Sudan, Somalia, and Darfur.

With less than six months until Uganda's next presidential elections, international rights groups have gathered in Uganda to highlight the erosion of freedom of expression in the east African nation. The group, which consists of seven human rights and freedom of expression organizations, warned on Thursday that recent attacks on free speech and media independence could mar the credibility of the February presidential elections.

Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki today called on the Security Council to abandon what he called its hands-off approach to Somalia and strengthen the African peacekeeping force in the country to counter the threat from Islamist militants. "The perceived reluctance of the United Nations Security Council to engage with Somalia has been a matter of great concern for those of us who suffer the greatest consequences of the conflict," he added.

Report details

Sudan: Sudanese Leaders Pledge All Efforts for Successful Referendum

24 September 2010: VOA news

Key leaders of north and south Sudan promised Friday to ensure that next January's planned referendum on independence for the southern region will go forward peacefully and on time. The pledges came at a meeting at the United Nations attended by world leaders, including U.S. President Barack Obama.

Mr. Obama's presence at the U.N meeting underscored the deep concern in Washington that Sudan's north-south peace process will derail unless the referendum goes ahead as planned without violence.

A six-year Sudan peace plan reaches a climax in January when the autonomous southern region votes on independence, and the oil-rich central Abiyeh region decides whether it will join the south.

Preparations for the voting, including delineation of a prospective north-south border, are far behind schedule.

In remarks to the meeting, President Obama said the Sudanese parties are at a critical juncture and the stakes are enormous. "At this moment, the fate of millions of people hangs in the balance. What happens in Sudan in the days ahead will decide whether a people who have endured too much war move toward peace or slip backward into bloodshed. And what happens in Sudan matters to all of sub-Saharan Africa and it matters to the world," he said.

U.S. diplomacy toward Sudan has been complicated by the the Darfur conflict in western Sudan, which has led to international war crimes charges against Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir.

The United States shuns direct contact with the Sudanese leader and accuses him of foot-dragging on the referendum. Mr. Obama made clear that the future of U.S.-Sudan relations depends not only on a successful referendum but accountability for Darfur crimes. "Now is the moment for all nations to send a strong signal that there will be not time and tolerance for spoilers who refuse to engage in peace talks. Indeed there can be no lasting peace in Darfur, and no normalization of relations between Sudan and the United States, without accountability for crimes that have been committed," he said.

Sudanese Vice President Ali Osman Taha, who spoke for the National Congress Party leadership, complained of the demonization of President Bashir, and said his contributions to the north-south peace process have been critical.

Taha said the mainly-Muslim Khartoum government prefers a referendum outcome that preserves Sudan's unity, but is prepared to accept the separation of the mostly-Christian and animist south. "I would like to recall before you here the determination and willingness of our government, particularly its leader, President Bashir, to make the difficult decisions without which peace was unattainable - the most of important of which is accepting the risk of relinquishing a cherished part of your history and future, and a valued part of your country," he said.

Southern Sudanese leader Salva Kiir, first vice president in the Khartoum unity government, said the northern authorities have not made unity an attractive option, and that all signs point to a secession vote.

If that occurs, he said the south is ready to work with Khartoum authorities for

long-term peace and stability. "We are genuinely willing to negotiate with our brothers in the National Congress Party, and we're prepared to work in a spirit of partnership to create peaceful and sustainable good relations between the north and southern Sudan for the long-term after the referendum. It is in our interest to see to it that northern Sudan remains a viable state, just as it should be in the interests of the north to see southern Sudan emerge also as a viable state," he said.

The north-south civil war was Africa's longest running conflict until it came to an end with the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Accord or CPA. It is believed to have killed nearly two million people while displacing millions more.

The CPA provided for the coalition government in Khartoum and six years of autonomy for the south, to be capped by the January 9, 2011 referendum.

Sudan: US Urges Sudan to Hold Referenda on Time

21 September 2010: VOA news

The United States is urging Sudan to meet its obligations under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and hold a referendum on-time that could see the South of the country secede from the North, otherwise, Khartoum could face new sanctions.

State Department Spokesman P.J. Crowley told reporters on the sidelines of annual meetings at the United Nations that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met earlier Tuesday with Sudanese Vice President Ali Osman Taha.

"She affirmed the U.S. commitment to full implementation of the CPA and reiterated that we need to see decisive action to ensure a peaceful, on-time referenda - it should be referenda - both for South Sudan and Abyei [region] in support of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement," said P.J. Crowley.

The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement ended Sudan's two-decade long north-south civil war.

Spokesman Crowley said Vice President Taha reiterated Khartoum's commitment to the CPA, and agreed there is a lot to be done before the January vote.

Western diplomats at the United Nations have in recent weeks expressed concern that preparations for the referenda are stalled. They worry that a postponed vote, or one that is seen to not have a credible result, could throw the country back into violence.

The U.S. spokesman said Washington is dispatching Princeton Lyman, a senior American diplomat, to the region again next week, as the U.S. increases its

presence on ground and intensifies its work with the parties. Crowley stressed the importance of Sudan meeting its obligations under the terms of the CPA, and said there would be consequences if it does not.

"If they don't do what we expect them to do - and we are setting an appropriately a high bar in terms of what Khartoum and Juba need to do - then there will be consequences, and those include a mix of carrots and sticks," he said.

He added that if Sudan, which is among the most heavily sanctioned countries in the world already, does what is expected of it, then there would be "clear opportunities" available to Khartoum. Other U.S. officials have said those opportunities would include improved relations with the United States and others in the international community.

The United Nations, which has more than 30,000 peacekeepers in South Sudan and Darfur, is hosting a special meeting Friday on the implementation of the CPA, which President Barack Obama is scheduled to attend. In advance of the session, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced Tuesday that he is appointing a three-person high-level panel to monitor the upcoming referenda.

The panel will be headed by former Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa and the two other members are former Portuguese Foreign Minister Antonio Monteiro and the former Chairman of Nepal's Election Commission, Bhojraj Pokharel.

The panel will make periodic visits to Sudan between now and January to engage all relevant actors and parties to the CPA, the referendum commissions, civil society and observer groups.

Sudan: Sudan Ruling Party Official says Dialogue Key to Successful Referendum

22 September 22: VOA news

A prominent member of Sudan's ruling National Congress Party (NCP) has called for more dialogue between supporters in favor of the country's "unity" and supporters of south Sudan's secession ahead of the scheduled 9th January referendum.

Professor Ibrahim Ghandour, a former vice chancellor of the University of Khartoum, told VOA the much-feared violence in the run up to the scheduled referendum could be avoided through dialogue and strong partnership between his party and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM).

“Separationists from north and south advocated their point of view, as well as unionists from north and south also advocated their point of view. And, we had comments from the SPLM, as well as comments from the NCP, which I represented in that meeting.”

Both the NCP and the south Sudan’s SPLM have been engaged in discussions to help avoid violence in the run up to south Sudan’s referendum. Some supporters of the SPLM have accused the NCP of undermining efforts to organize next year’s referendum, a charge Ghandour denies.

“We work hard to support the commission in order to execute the referendum on time, and we hope that it will take place. As you know, this was our position during the interim period since the signing of the CPA (Comprehensive Peace Agreement). We’ve always been keen to have and implement of each item of the CPA on time.”

The referendum commission has said it will start registering voters next month in preparation of the January vote.

But, some civil society groups have accused the commission of delaying the registration process contrary to a referendum law passed by Sudan’s National Assembly last December. According to the law, the initial voters register was scheduled to be completed before the end of August.

But, sharp disagreements over which party appoints someone to the position of the secretary-general stalled commission activities ahead of the January vote. Ghandour said both the NCP and the SPLM continue to work closely to ensure the referendum proceeds as originally scheduled.

“I think with the support of the international community and the political commitment from the two partners, the SPLM and NCP, the referendum will take place on time.”

Sudan: Obama to Attend High-Level Meeting on Sudan

24 September 2010: Margaret Beshee

U.S. President Barack Obama will attend a high-level meeting on Sudan Friday at the United Nations. Hosted by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and bringing together senior Western and African officials, the meeting is intended to focus international attention on Sudan in the lead-up to the January referendum which is likely to see Southern Sudan vote to secede from the North.

Many western diplomats at the U.N. have expressed concern over the last few weeks whether the referenda will be ready on time. One diplomat said the U.N. has indicated preparations are stalled.

Others say there are growing international fears that if the January vote does

not go ahead on schedule there could be violence, especially if the south were to unilaterally declare its independence. But they also worry that even if the referendum is held on time and the outcome is not respected or seen to not be credible that could also push the country back into another bloody civil war.

U.S. officials say President Obama is participating in Friday's meeting to convey his vision for how to move forward towards a successful referendum.

Samantha Power is a senior advisor to President Obama. She told reporters this week during a telephone briefing that Mr. Obama's main message to the Sudan meeting will be the need to rapidly implement the Comprehensive Peace Agreement - or CPA - which calls for the North-South vote and another one on the same day by the people of the Abyei region.

"So the number one message is that these referenda must go off on time; that they must be peaceful; and they must reflect the will of the people of South Sudan," she said.

Power says President Obama would also speak about the recent uptick in violence in the Darfur region of Sudan.

"We continue to see unacceptable conditions for the people living in camps and the fact that they - none of them feel safe enough to return to their homes," she added. "So he will, of course, speak to the need for enhanced security and dignity for the people of Darfur and the need for accountability, as well."

The meeting will also likely cover the need for access for aid workers and the importance of U.N. peacekeepers not having limitations on their freedom of movement.

There are currently more than 30,000 U.N. troops and police deployed in Darfur and Southern Sudan - the biggest concentration of blue helmets anywhere in the world.

U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice, says that while the international community is ready to support the Sudanese as they implement their commitments under the CPA, and there will be benefits for them if they do, there could also be consequences if they do not follow through on their obligations.

"We've also been clear that if they fail to follow through, that there will be - as we have always said in the context of our policy - consequences," said Rice. "Those might take the form of unilateral and/or multilateral [ie, sanctions], and we have got a number that are potentially at our disposal. But our aim is to spur them forward in their own interest."

Representing the Sudanese sides at the meeting will be Vice President Ali Osman Taha from the government of Sudan and Salva Kiir, the President of South Sudan. The chairman of the African Union, African officials, Western diplomats and senior U.N. officials are expected to attend the session chaired by U.N. secretary-general.

Sudan: Sudanese Ruling Party Official Hopeful of Improved US Relations

20 September 2010: Peter Clottey

A prominent member of Sudan's dominant National Congress Party (NCP) said President Omar Hassan al-Bashir's government believes it is time Khartoum and Washington normalize diplomatic relations.

The U.S. Embassy in Sudan has had no ambassador since 1998. Professor Ibrahim Ghandour, a former vice chancellor of the University of Khartoum, said President Bashir's government enjoys tremendous support from the Sudanese people following his recent electoral victory. He said that positions the administration to be a partner for U.S. interests across Africa.

"Sudan remains an important country, whether it remains united or separated," he said. "The area Sudan is having in North and Central Africa [and] between East and West Africa is a very important area for the United States policies in Africa, [and] for the America interest in Africa. Normalization of the U.S. and the Sudanese relations [are] very important for both sides." On August 12, 1993, the United States added Sudan to the list of state sponsors of terrorism after accusing Khartoum of continuing to pursue counter terrorism operations directly involving threats to U.S. interests and personnel in that country.

The sanctions the United States imposes on countries on the terrorism list include a ban on arms-related exports and sales, prohibitions on economic assistance, and imposition of financial and other restrictions.

Last year, President Barack Obama appointed retired Air Force Major General Scott Gration as the new Sudan envoy. Currently, he is helping Khartoum organize the January referendum that will allow residents in the semi-autonomous south Sudan to decide whether to secede from, or remain part of, Sudan.

Ghandour praised Gration's working relations with the Sudanese government. "General Gration has been doing, I think, an acceptable job during the last period. But, the problem is that still the Obama administration is under the pressure [from] lobby groups within the United States of America," he said.

He also criticized Susan Rice, U.S Ambassador to the United Nations, for being a longtime “enemy of Khartoum and, at a time, has called for the bombardment of Khartoum similar to what happened in Serbia.”

Sudan: Sudan Referendum Chairman Praises US Special Envoy’s Efforts

21 September 2010: Peter Clottey

The chairman of Sudan’s referendum commission said U.S special envoy Scott Gration is helping his organization resolve outstanding issues leading up to the scheduled January 9 referendum in the semi-autonomous south.

Professor Mohamed Ibrahim Khalil, who was also the first dean of law at the University of Khartoum, said Gration, a retired Air Force officer, has demonstrated Washington’s commitment in ensuring the success January referendum as agreed to in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). “General Gration is interested we keep in contact. He wants to know what is going on [and] I tell him what is going on. If there are any problems, I tell him. He has leverage [and] he has very good connections with everybody in the Sudan, [both] north and south, and he has been very helpful and cooperative,” he said.

This came after U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton reaffirmed with Sudan’s Vice President Ali Osman Taha about the need to hold a credible and transparent vote.

Khalil has been holding a series of meetings with the U.S special envoy to find ways of addressing his organization’s challenges in the run up to the referendum.

Some south Sudan-based civil society groups have questioned why Washington has so far failed to keep a pledge of about \$60 million to help fund activities of the referendum commission.

Khalil said the U.S. envoy has been very helpful as the referendum commission prepares for the next year’s vote.

I have not raised an issue about funding because, when we were talking about other problems, we were in the process of finalizing the budget. Now, the budget is finalized and all parties who promised to make commitments have made definite commitments, and I am assured that we will get funding in a timely manner,” Khalil said.

He, however, declined to detail the role Gration will play in his organization’s preparations.

Khalil praised the U.S envoy’s role in resolving the sharp disagreement between the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) and the Sudan People’s Liberation

Movement (SPLM) over the secretary-general position in the referendum commission.

“We had some problems about the secretary-general and he was extremely interested. He talked to various parties and then we got over that problem. There is no such thing as delineating areas where General Gration can help and areas where he cannot help,” said Khalil.

Sudan: Amnesty International urges Sudan to end press restrictions ahead of referendum

24 September 2010: Sudan tribune

September 23, 2010 (WASHINGTON) – The Sudanese authorities must halt the harassment and intimidation of journalists in the run up to the referendum on southern independence in January 2011, Amnesty International said in a press release today.

“No credible poll can be conducted in an environment where freedom of speech is being so openly violated,” said Rania Rajji, Amnesty International’s Sudan researcher.

“The governments of north and south Sudan must ensure the vote is held in an atmosphere where all Sudanese can freely express their views and halt any further restrictions to freedom of expression”.

Reporters without Borders ranked Sudan as number 148 in its 2009’s World Press Freedom Index.

The south is expected to vote to secede from the Islamic north against which it has fought an off-on civil war since 1955 over ethnicity, ideology and oil.

Southerners were promised a vote on whether to secede in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement which ended Africa’s longest civil war. The conflict claimed 2 million lives, mostly through hunger and disease, and destabilized much of east Africa.

This month, Mohamed Chande Othman, an independent expert on human rights in Sudan urged Khartoum to lift restrictions on the press in the run-up to the referendum.

"These developments represent a serious setback and are of particular concern as the country prepares for the referendum," Othman said in a speech to the U.N. Human Rights Council.

"It is essential that authorities uphold human rights principles as a way of ensuring a peaceful and credible referendum," he said.

Sudan stepped up censorship in February 2008 after some journalists excoriated the government for backing a failed push by Chadian rebels to storm the capital Ndjamena and overthrow President Idriss Deby.

The practice was later suspended as the country was approaching national elections in April 2010 and after chief editors of newspapers were forced to sign a journalistic code of honour obliging them to refrain from the publication of any content that crosses red-lines. These red-lines, in the words of Sudanese President Omer Hassan Al-Bashir, are anything "destructive to the nation, sovereignty, security, values and morality."

But censorship made a comeback last June, less than two months after the country held national elections which were supposed to herald an era of democratic transformation.

Last July, the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) closed down Al-Intibaha newspaper which a Northern owned newspaper that openly supports South secession and a fervent critic of the South Sudan government.

In the same month three journalists working at a paper belonging to the Popular Congress Party (PCP) of Hassan Al-Turabi were sentenced to jail on charges of attempting to destabilize the constitutional system.

They are specifically accused of having published "false" reports on an alleged factory in Sudan that makes weapons for Iran. They also wrote articles suggesting that \Bashir, which was re-elected in April polls, did not enjoy widespread support in Sudan.

Sudan: Imperfect peace in Sudan

24 September 2010: By James Smith

September 23, 2010 — On 24 September Foreign Ministers will meet in New York to discuss the dangers of renewed conflict in Africa's largest country. They have reason to be downbeat, because Sudan is complicated.

The plea of complexity is one reason Governments fail to prevent the world's worst atrocities, according the former UN Chief in Sudan, Dr Mukesh Kapila. He should know. Early in 2004, at the height of mass atrocities in Darfur, he sounded the alarm – which was met with a catalogue of excuses for inaction.

Having witnessed genocide in Rwanda and Srebrenica, Kapila believed he could recognize the difference between conflict and state organized slaughter when he

saw it. The Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) confirmed Kapila's view in July 2010, with an arrest warrant for Sudan's President on charges of genocide. ICC arrest warrants had already been issued against Sudanese officials Ali Kushayb and Ahmed Harun for crimes against humanity; but more on Harun later.

When in 2004 Kapila banged on the doors of power in New York, London, Paris and Washington, the crisis in Darfur was just too awkward to fit in to the priority agenda, focused on ending a different, though related, war between North and South in Sudan.

For over 20 years the Islamist Government in Khartoum had been engaged in a bloody civil war with animists and Christians in the South, at a cost of some two million Sudanese lives. A peace deal was brokered in 2005; the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which guaranteed the people of Southern Sudan a referendum on possible independence from the North.

Six years later, much is at stake. Many Southerners look forward to a 'promised land' following the referendum, but the future looks far from a paradise. The nub of the problem is that the North finds it hard to relinquish control of the oil beneath Southern Sudan. So border disputes remain unresolved. Preparations for the referendum are not in place, either mentally or logistically.

Should the referendum go ahead and the South split off, there is a risk of renewed war between North and South. There is also high chance that internal law and order will break down. Southerners are restless. They can't understand the pitiful lack of development despite rich oil revenues. South Sudan has virtually no roads, hardly any schools, and the one in ten children die before their fifth birthday.

Their complaints won't be expressed with petitions, but by organized militias. The region is awash with small arms, which the Southern leadership believe are being supplied by the North to destabilize the South before the expected new state has chance to take its first breath. Western nations are reluctant to pre-empt the referendum, yet if they don't ramp up assistance to the Government of South Sudan to achieve development in far-flung regions, strengthen rule of law and run conciliation programmes, South Sudan could be born a failed state. That would come at great human and financial cost to the Sudanese, and indeed to the World.

With all that at stake, it's hardly surprising there is little room on the agenda for Darfur this week. In the minds of many, that other regional crisis has quietly gone away. However, over two million people live in camps, too afraid to return to their homes. Ethnic cleansing is consolidating with the passage of time.

It is understandable that Governments try to address one Sudanese issue at a time, but the high-level representatives in New York this week should reflect on a recent complex conflict in Europe.

Back in 1995 a deal was hammered out in Dayton to end the dreadful mass killings in the former Yugoslavia. The Serb leader, Milosevic, was a partner in that peace. At the time, the province of Kosovo didn't fit neatly into the peace agreement framework, despite unrest pointing to serious troubles ahead. Again, it was just too complicated, so the province fell off the radar for a few years. Then Milosevic, encouraged that he was insulated politically, launched an attack on Kosovo Albanians. Aside from the human cost (which I witnessed first-hand as a doctor with the International Medical Corps), responding to the crisis and rebuilding Kosovo ran up a bill of some US\$50 billion over the subsequent decade. It was easier, it seems, for politicians to spend \$50 billion reacting to a crisis than focusing minds, getting tough and averting a disaster.

Dayton was imperative. But it was equally necessary to find a solution for Kosovo. Peace in the South of Sudan is imperative, and urgent. But it is equally necessary to find a solution for Darfur.

Diplomats should not lose sight of the thread running through all the crises in Sudan; a pattern in which the ruling National Congress Party governs by committing atrocities against its own civilians, behaviour encouraged by impunity for past crimes. Violence in or between the North and South could well spark rebellious marginalized groups to pursue violence themselves to achieve a degree of political and economic equality, not least in Darfur, East Sudan and South Kordofan. This latter state borders the South and is already a place of high tension, with hotly disputed borders and a rich oil field. In May 2008 the border town of Abyei was razed.

It is to the powder keg of South Kordofan that Ahmed Harun has been appointed Governor by the President of Sudan. Harun honed his craft there previously and earned the nickname the Butcher of Nuba in the 1990's. He then took his experience to Darfur for which he is wanted by the ICC for orchestrating crimes against humanity.

Diplomats don't like talk of justice when negotiating sensitive peace deals with the perpetrators of international crimes. Sometimes, it is argued, justice needs to give way for peace. However, in Sudan, impunity for crimes during the Southern war set a precedent for atrocities during the Darfur crisis. If a line is not drawn in the sand, the scene will be set for crimes in the next conflict. While border and oil issues must be resolved if there is to be sustainable peace, Ministers should also make it clear that appointing someone with Ahmed Harun's history of mass atrocity to govern Sudan's most volatile state is not acceptable.

The good news is that President Obama will attend the Sudan meeting in New York this Friday, a signal that the U.S. understands time is running out for Sudan. No small responsibility rests on the shoulders of the delegates. Such meetings can go down in history as turning points on the road to much-needed peace, or they can be noted as yet another missed opportunity save millions of people from the misery of brutal violence.

The author is the Chief Executive, Aegis Trust

Sudan: Defining the North-South Border – International Crisis Group

September 2010 – OVERVIEW

The January 2011 referendum on self-determination could result in Sudan's partition, and the country's North-South border may ultimately become the world's newest international boundary. The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that ended two decades of civil war called for the border between the North and the semi-autonomous South to be demarcated within six months. Five years later, the task remains incomplete. The sooner the parties break the border deadlock the better, though the process need not necessarily be completed prior to the referendum as Khartoum has argued previously. Furthermore, a solution to the border is about not only drawing a line, but also defining the nature and management of that border and the future relations of communities on both sides. A "soft" boundary is ideal, one backed by a framework for cross-border arrangements and, if necessary, safeguarded by a joint monitoring mechanism. Progress toward both demarcating and defining the border will prevent it from becoming a source of renewed conflict in the post-CPA era.

The undefined boundary has hindered CPA implementation, fuelled mistrust between its signatories and, most recently, contributed to heightened anxiety and insecurity along the border. The governments in Khartoum and Juba alike rely heavily on oil revenues that derive primarily from the border lands. The concentration of resources there has amplified the political and economic dimensions of an already contentious task. Both the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) have exhibited an aggressive military posture in some border areas. And many of the country's trans-boundary populations – some of whom represent significant political constituencies – fear possible secession of the South could result in a hardening of the boundary and a threat to their livelihood.

This important issue has for far too long been tied up in the Technical Border Committee (TBC), the body mandated to demarcate the border as it stood at Independence Day in 1956. The committee's extensive deliberations – as well as a poisoned atmosphere – have led to an impasse. Solid information regarding

the process, the work of those tasked to undertake it and the disputed areas has been scarce, leading to considerable confusion and speculation among political elites, border communities and international partners. While the committee has agreed on most of the border, five specific areas are disputed on technical grounds; and others remain contested in the public arena. Any prolonged review of maps and records is unlikely to yield agreement on the disputed areas, underscoring that this is no longer a technical issue, but a political one, and should be treated as such.

The two parties that signed the CPA – the long ruling National Congress Party (NCP) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) – began critical negotiations on post-referendum arrangements in July 2010. Border demarcation is not an agenda item, but the issues of border management and cross-border relations will undoubtedly arise and be affected by several others that are, including citizenship, national resources, economic cooperation, grazing rights and security. Progress on these fronts may lessen the potential impact of where exactly the boundary is drawn in the end.

The type of border and its exact location could well become bargaining chips in a grander set of trade-offs that will define the negotiations on post-referendum arrangements. And, while not everyone will be satisfied in the end, stability along the border will depend in part on the extent to which local actors feel they have had some role in defining border management and trans-border relations. Border communities are among those most directly affected by the current atmosphere of post-referendum uncertainty; examination of the disputed areas illustrates that the border can mean very different things to political elites than it does to the communities who live on it.

It is essential to feed into the post-referendum negotiations the promising work county and state actors, as well as international partners, are doing to lay the foundation for future cross-border relations. The NCP and SPLM, in concert with the UN and international partners, should:

- Recognise that resolution of the outstanding border disputes is no longer a technical issue, but a political one. As such, the national presidency – possibly through the recently established joint committee headed by Pagan Amum (SPLM) and Salah Gosh (NCP) – should assume full responsibility for achieving a solution. It should also decide on an agency to implement the demarcation, agree to UN participation in that process, and act upon renewed commitments to resume demarcation in the undisputed areas.
- Establish a sensitisation and feedback mechanism to allow border communities to contribute advice and ideas directly to negotiations on cross-border arrangements. Such a mechanism should also communicate to border communities the goals of those arrangements, namely that a vote for separation should not mean the boundary will become a barrier, and that

movement, trade, grazing rights and the interests of host communities will be protected. The “Tamazuj” forum – aimed at cooperation and integration among border state communities – is an appropriate framework for such a channel.

- Design one or more complementary border-monitoring mechanisms to support a soft and stable boundary, ensure the rights and responsibilities of border populations, and possibly monitor population movements and new security arrangements. This may include a monitoring and observation role for the UN and/or an alternative with a light footprint, high mobility and a focus on building local relationships, funded by international partners and employing lessons learned from previous models that have been used in Sudan.

***The International Crisis Group** is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organization committed to preventing and resolving deadly conflict.*

Sudan: USSP welcomes Clinton statements on "inevitable" South Sudan independence

22 September 2010: The united South Sudan Party (USSP)

Press release

US Says South Sudan independence inevitable but warns of a ticking time bomb. The United South Sudan Party (USSP) would like to make this statement in appreciation of the role and support given by the international community, and in particular the Troika, the IGGAD Countries and the United Nations towards the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed in January 9th 2005, between the Sudan Government in one hand and the SPLM/A on the other. We can confirm that despite the difficulties in the implementation of the key provisions of the CPA, the people of South Sudan have maintained high discipline and determination to exercise their rights on the Self Determination as agreed upon in the agreement. USSP is committed to this process no matter what happens.

In the light of the above, we would like to single out that the statement made by the US Secretary of State Madam Hilary Clinton on 8th September 2010, that South Sudan independence is inevitable is welcome. Furthermore, we believe that it reflects the recognition of the US administration in its capacity as the world’s major power – for the efforts and pledges of the people of South Sudan for an independence sovereign state come January 9th 2011 Self Determination Referendum and for that we remain grateful.

Indeed at the moment, the South Sudan and Abyei referenda represent the only hope for peace between the South and the North, thus the USSP is aware of the fact that without the continued support of the international community, Khartoum is more than likely to abuse the truce. Khartoum given its records may choose not to respect its commitment to conduct the referendum as

agreed upon in the CPA, in which case the South may be left with no option but to react in a way that may result in unwarranted consequences which may not be welcomed wholeheartedly by some members of the international community.

Should South Sudan opt for secession in the January 2011 referendum, USSP believes that the ideal approaches to the post referendum management of resources would be for the new country to have a full control over these resources and set in place a wise plan that will not lead to irresponsible over exploitation while at the same time to preserving enough resources to speed up development and recovery from the five decades' war wounds. The notion that the people of South Sudan have to earn their freedom from the Khartoum regime by making substantial payment or concession in the form of oil is unacceptable both in principle and practice. Beside, the south has already lost more than 2 million lives in the course of its struggle for this freedom; if this is not an enough price for freedom then, USSP wonders what price again could the South ever pay in order to be a free country?

We therefore appeal to the international community, who brokered the CPA to fully support the referendum in the Southern Sudan and the Abyei Area, without any preconditions. Southern Sudan remains one of the poorest regions if not the poorest of the poor in the sub-Saharan Africa. Most of South Sudan's oil revenues have been siphoned to the north and it is now only logical that the remaining oil in the south should be used to enable Southern Sudan to catch up with the rest of the world in as far as development and social services are concerned. It is thus pertinent to conclude here that only a developed South Sudan will be able to offer stability as an incentive to its neighbours, Northern Sudan included and the rest of the world.

While the whole world's attentions are now focused on the New York Meeting on the Sudan to take place on September the 24th, 2010, USSP would like to make some observations that it thinks is necessary. This meeting may be one of the rarest opportunities to bring together all the stake holders to the CPA together especially in the presence of the US President Baraka Obama, the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon, the representatives of the EU, and the others while they listen to the two Sudanese delegations from the SPLM & the NCP. The SPLM delegation is headed by Salva Kiir Mayardit, Sudan's first vice president, president of south Sudan and the chairman of south's ruling party, the SPLM , on the other hand the NCP delegation is led by Sudan's vice president none but the dominant NCP senior official Ali Osman Taha.

The composition of those who are expected to turn up for the above meeting makes it an exceptional event. However USSP would like to stress that should this summit end up in yet another list of agreements and promises that will later on only be undermined or never implemented, then there is a real danger awaiting the Sudan, and the region at large.

USSP maintains that both the referenda (South Sudan & Abyei) and the popular consultations (Nuba Mountains & Southern Blue Nile Regions), must take place on time; must be free, fair and credible; and must be seen to be so. The two CPA signatories, NCP and SPLM must be held accountable for this, but particular attention must be paid to the NCP, which has been responsible for most of the delays so far, and it no doubt continues to harbour ill-intentions.

USSP believes that the UN (and/or other appropriate international bodies) must play a leading role in technical, operational and logistical implementation of the referenda and popular consultations, and must be given freedom and responsibility to do so. While doing so, they must also pay a particular attention to the possibility of rigging the southern referendum result via the 60% turn-out condition. The registration process, the eligibility of voters and the ability of voters to cast their votes on polling day must all be closely monitored. Thus every southern Sudanese citizen who registers must be encouraged and facilitated actually to cast her/his vote.

USSP sees it of a vital importance that the New York Meeting will do well should the third parties, especially the guarantors to the CPA, - clearly declare in the most unequivocal terms their preparedness to recognise the new south Sudan state if the referendum results in a yes to secession. They should also see to it that the negotiations on post-referendum arrangements are revitalised and speeded up, in good faith.

Last but not least USSP would like to appeal to The International Donor Community that they should speed up their support of state building in south Sudan if the referendum results in secession. However a point of a great importance is that, should south Sudan declare independence unilaterally as a last resort following NCP intransigence, the international community must be ready and fast at recognising the new state.

In conclusion USSP in its continuous faith in the US administration and all the other peace loving members of the international community remains appreciative for the current attention that south Sudan has gathered, however the job will be half done without them equally taking a much tougher approach against Khartoum in addressing the conflict in Darfur. An immediately end to the killings of innocent lives in this region of the Sudan must be reached. All the warring sides in Darfur should be brought to the negotiating table and a peaceful political settlement realized.

God bless us all.

Clement Mbugoniwia, USSP Leader

Sudan: Sudanese Official: South Sudanese May Lose Citizenship

25 September 2010: VOA News

A top Sudanese official says people in south Sudan will no longer be citizens of the north if their region votes for independence in a January referendum.

Information Minister Kamal Obeid told state media Saturday that south Sudanese will be considered citizens of another state if they choose independence.

On Friday, southern Sudan President Salva Kiir said northern authorities have not made unity an attractive option, and that all signs point to a secession vote.

Sudan's January 9 referendum will allow residents of the country's semi-autonomous south to choose whether or not to become an independent country.

At the United Nations Friday, leaders of north and south Sudan vowed to work for peace as U.S. President Barack Obama called for an on-time referendum in Sudan.

President Obama told a high-level U.N. meeting the stakes for the January referendum are enormous and said the fate of millions of people lies in the balance.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who hosted the meeting on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly, said the referendum must be peaceful and free of intimidation.

The referendum grew out of the [Comprehensive Peace Agreement](#) in 2005 that ended two decades of civil war between northern and southern Sudan. Preparations for the voting, including delineation of a prospective north-south border, are far behind schedule.

Somalia: Somali Activist Calls for Leader's Resignation over Security Losses

21 September 2010: VOA news

The chairman of the Somali concerned group, an advocacy organization based in London has demanded the resignation of President Sheik Sharif Sheikh Ahmed after accusing the beleaguered leader of failing to meet the aspirations of Somalis.

Mohamud Gure, a former lecture at the Somalia National University said the government has failed to live up to its constitutional mandate to protect ordinary unarmed Somalis by losing ground to hard line Islamist insurgents such as al-Shabab.

“The TFG (Transitional Federal Government) ship has already sunk and there is no future for it. So, the prime minister has to resign and, I think, what the Somalis want to see (is for) the president (to) also resign, to see the country (saved) from the catastrophic takeover by Islamists,” he said.

President Ahmed appointed Abdiwahid Elmi Gonjeh as acting Prime Minister after he accepted the resignation of Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke. President Ahmed and former Prime Minister Sharmarke have disagreed over the process of ratifying the country’s draft constitution. President Ahmed fired Mr. Sharmarke, but was forced to reverse his decision after consulting lawyers in the administration.

Professor Gure said the resignation of Sharmarke will not resolve the worsening security situation in Somalia.

“The government has already failed and the power struggle we saw in the last few months between the president and the prime minister was basically for each to find a scapegoat route where (they were) playing the blame game about who was responsible for the failure of the TFG.” He also said that the “failure and weakness” of the government has conspired to strengthen the hard-line Islamic insurgents.

The insurgents continue to battle almost daily with African Union troops (AMISOM), as well as government forces. They have also vowed to overthrow the Somali administration and implement the strictest form of the Sharia Law. Described by Washington as a terrorist organization with strong links to al-Qaeda, al-Shabab rebels control large portions of the capital, Mogadishu, as well as other parts of the country.

Somalia: 20 Killed in New Somalia Fighting

23 September 2010: VOA News

New clashes in Somalia's capital, Mogadishu, between pro-government troops and Islamist insurgents have killed at least 20 people and wounded at least 68 others.

Witnesses say the fighting began Thursday when insurgents attacked government and African Union forces. The fighting was centered in two government-held neighborhoods - Hodan and Howldag. Medics say most of the dead are civilians.

Militant group al-Shabab launched an offensive exactly one month ago in an effort to topple the government. Al-Shabab and another insurgent group, Hizbul Islam, control much of southern Somalia and most of the capital.

The United Nations will hold a crisis meeting on Somalia Thursday. Diplomats from fellow African Union countries say the situation is dire.

Equatorial Guinea's AU ambassador said Somalia is effectively "occupied" by terrorists. He said the transitional federal government needs to show it is united and engaged. The AU special representative for Somalia said the "lack of cohesion" in the government is undermining its efforts to get support for its fight against the insurgency.

On Tuesday, Prime Minister Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke resigned after a long-running feud with President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed. The president on Wednesday appointed an acting prime minister, Abdiwahid Elmi Omar, also known as Gonjeh.

Somalia has not had a stable central government since 1991.

Somalia: AU Tells Somalia's Leaders to Get Serious

23 September 2010: Peter Heinlein | Addis Ababa

African Union diplomats are telling Somalia's feuding leaders to "get serious" if they want international help in battling al-Qaida linked terror groups. Africa's top security body heard a dire assessment of Somalia ahead of a crisis meeting at the United Nations.

Amid mounting reports of deteriorating conditions in Somalia, the AU Peace and Security Council issued an urgent plea for member states to make good on promises to come to the aid of the country's Transitional Federal Government. Equatorial Guinea's AU ambassador Ruben Maye Nsue Mangué is the Council chairman for September.

"We are very very deeply concerned about the situation in Somalia. We have decided to ask direct member states to do their contribution in all areas, otherwise it's a problem that affects our collective security," said Ruben Maye Nsue Mangué.

Hours before a crisis meeting at UN headquarters called by Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, Ambassador Mangué called on Somalia's feuding leaders to show seriousness in the face of an imminent threat of a takeover by al-Qaida linked terror groups.

"The country is occupied by the terrorists, it's occupied. It's a real occupation. Now the big bad news we have got today is the increasing misunderstanding

inside the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia," added Mangué. "They have to be united and they have to understand that if Africa and the international community will not see seriousness and engagement among themselves that will not be good. A nation like Somalia cannot be in conflict for decades."

"AU Deputy Special Representative for Somalia Diarra Boubacar briefed the Council. He said this week's resignation of Somali Prime Minister Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke underscores the TFG's weakness, further undermining efforts to win international backing for efforts to defeat extremists militias controlling much of the country.

"It is this lack of cohesion within the TFG institutions. The lack of cohesion is a big problem for us," said Boubacar. "We need more comprehension [within] the TFG of its role to install security on the ground. I think also a big concern is the terrorism we face on the ground coming from al-Shabab."

News from Mogadishu Thursday told of clashes in two city suburbs between forces loyal to the government and al-Shabab rebels, and heavy shelling in the city's main market. Scores of people were said to have been killed and injured, though exact numbers were impossible to verify.

The African Union maintains a 7,200 strong peacekeeping mission in Somalia to reinforce the outmanned government security forces. The mission is made up largely of Ugandan and Burundian troops.

Efforts to solicit troop contributions from other African nations have been mostly unsuccessful, an ambassador representing a country with one of Africa's largest armies, when asked about a possible troop deployment, said "it's just too big a challenge".

The envoy, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the international community's hesitation to engage is a reflection of the difficulty of conditions on the ground. He said there would be little appetite for sending troops unless peacekeepers were given a stronger mandate, allowing them to pursue and drive out insurgents.

Somalia: No Easy Solution for Peace in Somalia

September 2010: Alisha Ryu

In Somalia, militant Islamist threats last month to launch a final war against the United Nations-backed government in Mogadishu have been followed by renewed fighting that has killed hundreds more in the besieged city. Questions are being raised as to whether the transitional government and its

international backers have a plan and are moving toward a solution that could help end the conflict.

Last week, following a brief visit to Mogadishu, the U.N. Undersecretary-General for Political Affairs Lynn Pascoe expressed confidence that Somalia's Transitional Federal Government, through the support of the international community, will find a way to establish security and begin the task of uniting Somalis against al-Shabab, a militant al-Qaida-linked group that has vowed to seize the whole of the country.

We just had a very good talk with the AU [African Union] and IGAD [Inter-Governmental Authority on Development] representatives on the coordination of strategy, on making sure that the funds and things that we have been talking about going to the TFG [Transitional Federal Government] to support their programs are getting there. The government is still reaching out," said Pascoe. "In the face of all of the negative reports - how everything is failing, how things are terrible, how the government is too weak - in fact, I think the people need to look more carefully at the underlying trends and see where they are going."

Many observers in and outside Somalia say the trend they see is far more bleak - a continuing bloody stalemate in the capital with neither the government nor al-Shabab, being able to prevail over the other.

International Crisis Group analyst E. J. Hogendoorn says that is because the international community is largely responding to the al-Shabab threat militarily rather than politically. The United Nations and the United States, which supports the African Union peacekeeping mission in Somalia known as AMISOM, have been encouraging African states to join Uganda and Burundi in sending troops to Somalia to protect the government from insurgent attacks.

"I think, to some degree, military force to weaken al-Shabab is not a bad thing. But military force needs to be used to further a political strategy," said Hogendoorn. "Just increasing the size of AMISOM without a consensual strategy among the international community as to how to stabilize Somalia is not going to achieve anything."

Hogendoorn and other analysts have expressed dismay at the dismal progress being made to reform the transitional government, which, since its birth in 2004 in neighboring Kenya, has been unable to shake off its image as a body of greedy officials far more interested in amassing personal power and wealth than providing basic services to the Somali people.

When Ethiopia, with U.S. support, ousted the Islamic Courts Union and installed the government in Mogadishu in late 2006, allegations of rampant government corruption and its ties to Ethiopia helped al-Shabab gain vital

support from Somali business communities and win thousands of new recruits.

As the insurgency escalated, the United Nations sponsored a power-sharing deal signed in Djibouti in mid-2008 that brought in hundreds of Islamist opposition members into the government. It was hoped that the new TFG would be able to reconcile with anti-government forces and begin the task of governing.

But two years later, the TFG under former Islamist leader Sharif Sheik Ahmed has not reconciled with any of its opponents and still lacks popular base and support. Recent attempts to bring the staunchly anti-al-Shabab Ahlu-Sunna Wal-Jama'a Sufi militia into the government have largely failed with Ahlu-Sunna splitting into pro and anti-government factions.

Hogendoorn says increasing in-fighting and power struggles have been crippling the government's ability to reach a consensus and make decisions. He says calls for reform have also been ignored.

"One of the dynamics that you certainly saw was that the TFG recognize for quite some time that it was essentially the only game in town for the international community. I can tell you from talking to diplomats about this issue, there is no stomach for re-visiting the Djibouti process," said Hogendoorn. "So, the TFG were able to use that as leverage to resist pressure from the international community to do things it wanted it [the government] to do."

U.S.-based Somalia observer Michael Weinstein says the inability of the international community to establish the transitional government as a viable alternative to al-Shabab is a critical point.

"The reason why we have this slow-bleed, this stalemate is that the West, particularly, Washington, is left with no cards in its hand," said Weinstein. "The situation has gone too far. It has become too fragmented. There is no viable force to replace the TFG."

Weinstein says what happens next in Somalia is anyone's guess.

Somalia: MI5: Somalia, Yemen Pose Increasing Threat to Security

20 September 2010: VOA news

The head of Britain's security services has said al-Qaida plots targeting Britain are increasingly originating from Somalia and Yemen. He described Somalia as a "seedbed for terrorism" and said it resembles Afghanistan during the 1990s.

Jonathon Evans, director-general of Britain's domestic security services, MI5 said Britain's counter-terrorism strategies are getting better but the risk of lethal terror attacks remains.

Speaking Thursday evening to security industry professionals, Evans said that the nature of the threat is evolving.

Just a few years ago, he said, 75 percent of suspected terror threats were originating from northwest Pakistan, but today that percentage has dropped to 50 percent.

Now, he said, the threat to Britain's security is increasingly coming from elsewhere, namely from the African countries Yemen and Somalia.

Wyn Rees, Professor of International Security at Britain's University of Nottingham, agrees.

By fighting against and driving al-Qaida out of a country like Afghanistan, it has effectively spread, it's been weakened, but it has gone to other parts of the world," said Rees.

Security professionals have paid increasing attention to Yemen since a failed bomb plot on a U.S.-bound plane in December last year.

Rees says conflict-ridden Somalia is also a ripe breeding ground for terrorism. The country has not had a functioning central government since the early 1990s. The U.N.-backed transitional government has been battling the militant group al-Shabab for the past three years.

Rees says the security threat posed by al-Shabab, which is allied with al-Qaida, goes beyond Somalia's borders.

"They are effectively an armed group within the country who are willing to train foreign jihadist as part of their own struggle and also perhaps for those people to go back to western countries afterwards to conduct terrorist actions subsequently," added Rees.

In his speech, Evans said it's only a matter of time before militants now fighting alongside al-Shabab bring terror to the streets of Britain.

He said defending Britain against a terror threat during the 2012 Olympics will be a major challenge.

Somalia: Somali Journalists say Islamists are Wiping out Free Flow of Information

20 September 2010: VOA news

A Somali media-rights group says fighting between Islamist militants and the country's U.N.-backed government is about to explode in a propaganda war for the hearts and minds of the Somali people.

The secretary general of the National Union of Somali Journalists, Omar Faruk Osman, says three of Mogadishu's 14 radio stations are now under the control of Islamist militants. Osman says there is no question the militants are determined to wipe out independent reporting in the country.

"This is a wider campaign to take over all private radio stations, and our main concern is that this will be used as a tool for hate media that we know there will be a negative effect on society," Osman said.

Radio stations in Mogadishu

On Saturday, armed fighters loyal to extremist al-Shabab and Hizbul Islam groups forcibly took over two private radio stations in the capital.

Al-Shabab fighters raided the offices of HornAfrica in Mogadishu's al-Shabab-controlled Bakara Market. Separately, Hizbul Islam fighters entered the headquarters of Global Broadcasting Corporation in the Heliwa district of the capital and took over its radio and television studios. A month ago, al-Shabab took over the management of another privately-owned station, Radio Holy Quran, after delivering a threatening letter.

Islamic Insurgents

Since 2007, al-Shabab has been leading an insurgency to topple the U.N.-backed Transitional Federal Government in Mogadishu, aiming to create an ultra-conservative Islamic state throughout southern and central Somalia and beyond.

The al-Qaida-linked group controls much of the south and large areas of the capital. But it has been unable to seize the whole of Mogadishu and key installations such as the airport and seaport, which are protected by more than 7,000 African Union peacekeeping troops.

During the recent Islamic holy month of Ramadan, the group vowed to wage what it described as a "massive" and "final" war against the government and peacekeepers. It sent suicide bombers to attack the airport and a hotel popular with government officials. It bombarded the presidential palace with mortars, managing, at one point, to briefly seize the main road that connects the palace

to the airport.

But after weeks of fighting that left hundreds of people dead and wounded, neither side has been able to declare victory over the other.

Spread misinformation

With the ground war at a stalemate, Osman says he believes al-Shabab now wants to control the airwaves and spread false information that could help the militants gain the upper hand.

"The media will be used to wage war, to inflame hostilities, to instill fear in the hearts of the people," Osman added. "The other concern we also have is [the] increasing attempts to infiltrate media houses. They are knocking on doors of media houses, offering 'I will work for you free of charge.' Or trying to recruit some of the security guards of the media houses. So that is our concern now."

Osman says there is also a possibility that the Somali Transitional Federal Government will be tempted to counter al-Shabab's propaganda war by trying to manipulate and censor the media just as harshly.

In June, eight journalists were wounded in Mogadishu by an explosion that ripped through a press conference being held by al-Shabab. Somali and international media watchdogs accused government troops of launching the attack to silence the journalists.

Somalia: US to seek stronger ties with Somaliland and Puntland

25 September 2010: BBC news

The US wants to strengthen its ties with Somalia's breakaway regions Somaliland and Puntland, the Obama administration's top diplomat for Africa has said.

The new, "aggressive" engagement could help to head off the Islamist insurgents, Johnnie Carson said.

But there were no plans to recognize the regions as independent states.

Mr Carson said his government would also continue to support the Somali government.

The assistant secretary of state for Africa said the US would send more aid workers and diplomats to Puntland and Somaliland and support the governments of both regions, in the north of Somalia, with development projects.

"In the past we have not engaged with these areas and political entities aggressively. We will now start to do so," Mr. Carson said.

"We think both of these parts of Somalia have been zones of relative political and civil stability, and we think they will in fact be a bulwark against extremism and radicalism that might emerge from the south."

The BBC's Africa analyst Martin Plaut says the initiative represents a significant policy shift and a step away from dealing with Somalia only through the weak transitional government in Mogadishu.

Somalia has been wracked by violence for much of the past 20 years. It has not had a functioning central government since 1991.

Swathes of the country and most of the capital Mogadishu are controlled by al-Shabab, a hardline Islamist group which has admitted to links with al-Qaeda.

Somaliland declared itself independent in the early 1990s but is not internationally recognized.

Somalia: Somali President Urges International Help to Fight Terrorism

25 September 2010: VOA News

Somalia's president has urged the international community to address threats posed by the Somali terrorist group al-Shabab, an affiliate of al-Qaida.

Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed told world leaders at the U.N. General Assembly Saturday that any delay in addressing this "clear and present danger" would prolong regional instability and international terrorism. He called on the U.N. Security Council to pass a resolution aimed at deterring the spread of al-Qaida terrorists and their "homegrown" affiliates such as al-Shabab.

Al-Shabab launched a bloody offensive about one month ago in hopes of toppling Somalia's transitional government and setting up a strict Islamic state. Al-Shabab and another insurgent group, Hizbul Islam, control much of southern Somalia and most of the capital, Mogadishu.

The government has held on to a few key areas of Mogadishu with the help of soldiers in an African Union force.

On Thursday, new clashes between pro-government troops and Islamist insurgents in Mogadishu killed 20 people and wounded 68 others.

In his speech before the U.N. General Assembly, President Sheikh Sharif

Sheikh Ahmed also noted what he described as terrorism by pirates attacking ships in the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden. He said such piracy is threatening maritime and international trade.

Somalia has not had a stable central government since 1991.

Somalia: US Boosts Ties with Breakaway Somali Regions

25 September 2010: VOA News

The United States says it plans to strengthen ties with two breakaway regions in Somalia to try to undercut a growing threat from Islamist extremists.

The top U.S. diplomat for Africa, Johnnie Carson, said Friday the United States will begin what he called an aggressive engagement with the semi-autonomous regions of Puntland and Somaliland.

Carson said the United States does not plan to recognize either government as an independent state, but would help them with agriculture, water, health and education projects.

He said the increased cooperation could prevent the spread of extremism and radicalism espoused by the al-Qaida linked al-Shabab militia.

Carson said the United States would also reach out to groups in south-central Somalia that are opposed to al-Shabab but are also not aligned with the transitional government in Mogadishu.

Somalia has not had a stable central government since 1991. Somalia's transitional government only controls small sections of Mogadishu, with the help of AU peacekeepers.

Islamist militants control most of the capital and large parts of southern and central Somalia. They have been trying to topple the government to set up a strict Islamic state.

Somalia: Somaliland Foreign Minister Welcomes 'Renewed' U.S Interest

26 September 2010: VOA news

Somaliland's Minister of Foreign Affairs said the willingness of residents living in the self-declared autonomous region to fully embrace democracy has played a pivotal role in making the area unattractive to hard-line Islamist insurgents, such as al-Shabab.

Mohammed Abdullahi Omar welcomed what he described as the renewed U.S. interest after a top official in the Obama administration said Washington wants to strengthen ties with both Somaliland and Puntland, located in the Horn of Africa.

“We are very pleased with the statement coming from the United States government stating that they will like to strengthen the cooperation and the relationship they have with the government of Somaliland. I think this is great news and we are very delighted with the increased and the renewed interest from the U.S. side in Somaliland.”

Omar also said the renewed interest will present his government with the opportunity to collaborate with Washington on a number of issues that “have got mutual interests for both countries.”

Johnnie Carson, the U.S assistant secretary of State for African Affairs, said strengthening relations with both breakaway regions of Somalia could help stave off growing threats of hard-line Islamist insurgents. Carson said Washington will be supporting both self-declared autonomous regions by sending diplomats and more aid workers there.

Omar said his country is pleased with the revived U.S interest in Somaliland.

“Somaliland has been stable for the last 19 years and we have definitely adopted (a) system into our politics. And, we have had a free and fair presidential election a few weeks ago, whereby a new president won the election. This has demonstrated that Somaliland’s political system has matured.”

He added that Somaliland’s “matured” democracy has renewed interest not only from Washington, but also “other western countries, and made them change their view on Somaliland.”

Somalia: AU Tells Somalia's Leaders to Get Serious

23 September 2010: VOA news

African Union diplomats are telling Somalia's feuding leaders to "get serious" if they want international help in battling al-Qaida linked terror groups. Africa's top security body heard a dire assessment of Somalia ahead of a crisis meeting at the United Nations.

Amid mounting reports of deteriorating conditions in Somalia, the AU Peace and Security Council issued an urgent plea for member states to make good on promises to come to the aid of the country's Transitional Federal Government.

Equatorial Guinea's AU ambassador Ruben Maye Nsue Mangué is the Council chairman for September.

"We are very very deeply concerned about the situation in Somalia. We have decided to ask direct member states to do their contribution in all areas, otherwise it's a problem that affects our collective security," said Ruben Maye Nsue Mangué.

Hours before a crisis meeting at UN headquarters called by Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, Ambassador Mangué called on Somalia's feuding leaders to show seriousness in the face of an imminent threat of a takeover by al-Qaida linked terror groups.

"The country is occupied by the terrorists, it's occupied. It's a real occupation. Now the big bad news we have got today is the increasing misunderstanding inside the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia," added Mangué. "They have to be united and they have to understand that if Africa and the international community will not see seriousness and engagement among themselves that will not be good. A nation like Somalia cannot be in conflict for decades."

"AU Deputy Special Representative for Somalia Diarra Boubacar briefed the Council. He said this week's resignation of Somali Prime Minister Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke underscores the TFG's weakness, further undermining efforts to win international backing for efforts to defeat extremists militias controlling much of the country.

"It is this lack of cohesion within the TFG institutions. The lack of cohesion is a big problem for us," said Boubacar. "We need more comprehension [within] the TFG of its role to install security on the ground. I think also a big concern is the terrorism we face on the ground coming from al-Shabab."

News from Mogadishu Thursday told of clashes in two city suburbs between forces loyal to the government and al-Shabab rebels, and heavy shelling in the city's main market. Scores of people were said to have been killed and injured, though exact numbers were impossible to verify.

The African Union maintains a 7,200 strong peacekeeping mission in Somalia to reinforce the outmanned government security forces. The mission is made up largely of Ugandan and Burundian troops.

Efforts to solicit troop contributions from other African nations have been mostly unsuccessful, an ambassador representing a country with one of Africa's largest armies, when asked about a possible troop deployment, said "it's just too big a challenge".

The envoy, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the international community's hesitation to engage is a reflection of the difficulty of conditions

on the ground. He said there would be little appetite for sending troops unless peacekeepers were given a stronger mandate, allowing them to pursue and drive out insurgents.

Eritrea: Report: Eritrea May Become Failed State

22 September 22: Selah Hennessy

Eritrea is at risk of becoming a failed state, according to a new report from the [International Crisis Group](#). It says internal repression coupled with international military conflict means the country is becoming increasingly isolated in the Horn of Africa.

The [report](#) says during the past decade Eritrea's government has clamped down on dissent on a colossal scale.

It says Eritrea's jails are full of political prisoners, journalists, and religious dissidents who are regularly targeted by the state.

CG's E.J. Hogendoorn says Eritrea has also undergone major military mobilization – a policy that has hit the country's youth hardest.

"It has mobilized almost all of Eritrea's youth into so-called national service," Hogendoorn said. "So essentially, if you are a young Eritrean you are indefinitely serving in the military or in national service."

The report says Eritrea has fought either directly or indirectly with Ethiopia, Yemen, Djibouti, and Sudan and been involved in conflicts in eastern Sudan, Somalia, and Darfur.

An estimated 80,000 people were killed in a two-year border dispute with Ethiopia that ended in 2000.

Hogendoorn says Eritrea's militarization affects the entire region.

"The Horn of Africa is very much an interlocked region and what people need to recognize is that if they want to promote peace and stability in other places, such as Somalia, what needs to be recognized is that regional players play a big role in that instability and as such those regional problems need to be addressed holistically," Hogendoorn added.

Hogendoorn says the Eritrean government uses an ongoing border dispute with neighboring Ethiopia to justify repression. He says Ethiopia has not fulfilled border promises made in the Algiers Agreements, a 2000 deal between the two countries.

The U.N. Security Council, he says, should urge Ethiopia to accept the border ruling.

"It needs to put pressure on Ethiopia to abide by these border rulings in an effort to move the process forward and to try to foster some sort of normalization of relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea," said Hogendoorn.

Mohamed Dalmar is a Britain-based political analyst from Somaliland. He says Eritrea is key to stability in the Horn of Africa.

"Eritrea is now at the center of a troubled region," Dalmar said. "And if another failed state that crumbles is added into the picture I think it will be rather disastrous."

Eritrea faces UN sanctions for allegedly supporting Islamist rebels in Somalia.

Uganda: Rights Groups Gather in Uganda to Investigate Crackdown on Freedom of Expression

23 September 2010: VOA news

With less than six months until Uganda's next presidential elections, international rights groups have gathered in Uganda to highlight the erosion of freedom of expression in the east African nation.

In the wake of the deaths of two journalists over the past month, the International Partnership group for Uganda has completed a three-day mission to investigate growing reports of media and political repression in the east African nation. The group, which consists of seven human rights and freedom of expression organizations, warned on Thursday that recent attacks on free speech and media independence could mar the credibility of the February presidential elections.

Chief among the group's concerns are current and proposed laws which threatened the freedom of the press.

While Uganda's constitution includes provisions to protect journalists and media houses, laws such as the Anti-Terror act and the Electronic Media Act are potential threats to that protection. According to the group, the Electronic Media Act gives the Ugandan Broadcast Council broad authority to shut down media outlets.

Many of the laws have been designed to maintain security in Uganda, but a representative for Washington-based Freedom House, Courtney Radsch, says they have been applied arbitrarily to silence critics.

"The laws appear to be intended to restrict criticism of the government and the ruling party," said Radsch. "They are applied selectively and they are applied

without consistent and corroborative explanations. For example last year, four radio stations were closed allegedly for inciting violence. The problem is that they were closed without due process, without following the policies and regulations that are in place."

The stations Radsch was referring to were closed in the wake of September 2009 riots in the capital, Kampala. The riots began when the traditional King of Uganda's largest ethnic group, the Buganda, was barred from entering a district considered to be part of the Buganda kingdom. Of the four radio stations shut down, CBS Radio, owned by the Bugandan King, remains closed.

The group also raised concerns that media ownership created a dangerous conflict of interest for journalists in Uganda. The Ugandan Broadcast council estimates that 10 percent of Ugandan radio stations are owned by politicians. But according to Radsch the mission's research revealed that figure was closer to 70 percent. The International Partnership Group warned that political control of Ugandan media compromised independent journalism and prevented opposition from expressing their views to the public.

The Mission on Thursday urged the Ugandan parliament to protect press freedoms through the implementation of Uganda's Access to Information Act as well as the rejection of the Press and Journalist Amendment Bill. While the proposed law would protect confidential sources of information, the mission said the rest of the bill's provisions would impose "onerous and undue restrictions on press freedom."

Kenya: Kenya Calls on Security Council to Pay Greater Attention to Conflict

23 September 2010: UN news service

Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki today called on the Security Council to abandon what he called its hands-off approach to Somalia and strengthen the African peacekeeping force in the faction-torn country to counter the threat from Islamist militants.

"Somalia continues to suffer benign neglect from the international community leading to many lost opportunities to resolve the crisis," he told the General Assembly on the opening day of its annual high-level segment.

"The perceived reluctance of the United Nations Security Council to engage with Somalia has been a matter of great concern for those of us who suffer the greatest consequences of the conflict," he added, reaffirming the central role of the UN in global governance.

He said critical proposed measures adopted by the African regional Inter-Government and Development (IGAD) group showed the way forward, calling for the appointment of an eminent high level personality for Somalia, the effective deployment of 2,000 additional troops, enhancing the capacity of the 5,000-strong African Union peacekeeping mission (AMISOM) and boosting support to the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in its fight against Islamist militants.

Unfortunately, the support needed to implement these decisions by the international community has not been forthcoming," he declared. "It is against this background that Kenya urges the United Nations and the entire international community to seize the opportunity created by the African regional initiative and lends support to the proposed measures.

Somalia has not had a functioning central government since for nearly two decades, during which it has been torn apart by factional fighting, most recently between the TFG and Al Shabaab Islamists and other militias.

"Today, as this Assembly convenes, the security situation in Somalia continues to deteriorate and threaten peace and stability across the entire region and beyond," he declared. "Needless to say the threat posed by today's Somalia to international peace and security is greater than in any other conflict in the world."

Mr. Kibaki also stressed the role of IGAD in ensuring that January's self-determination referendum goes forward in southern Sudan as planned, the final stage in the 2005 comprehensive peace agreement (CPA) that ended two decades of war between the south and the central Government.

He said Sudanese President Omar Bashir and First Vice President and Southern Sudanese leader Salva Kiir had reaffirmed to him their commitment to resolve all the outstanding issues, to hold the referendum on 9 January and accept the outcome of the vote.

"These efforts by the neighbors of Sudan and the African Union have created momentum that is critical ..." he said. "It is critical that the world stands in support of these initiatives as Sudan takes critical steps in relation to its future governance.

