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December 30, 2010

# Peace Hovers in Sudan, but Most Soldiers Stay Armed

By **JOSH KRON**

JUBA, Sudan — Nearly six years ago, northern and southern Sudan signed a peace agreement after decades of civil war, hoping to finally bring the suffering to an end. Hundreds of thousands of soldiers had fought one another, some growing up on the battlefield. In the south, millions of people lost their lives, villages disappearing beneath plumes of smoke.

The peace negotiations included agreements on representation in government, the sharing of wealth and a huge reduction in troops on both sides, by 180,000 soldiers in all. Many treaties had collapsed before, and there were moments when this one seemed doomed as well, but it has managed to endure — nearly all the way to its climax, a vote on Jan. 9 on independence for the south.

With little more than a week to go until the vote, ballots have been printed, voters registered and [campaign rallies held](#). A [countdown clock](#) is posted in the capital, Juba, and foreign officials are flying in for the occasion.

But a major component is lagging: virtually none of the soldiers have put down their weapons and fully rejoined civilian life.

Since the main thrust of Sudan's demobilization and reintegration program began — about four years late — no more than 400 soldiers have completed the journey and been reintegrated into civilian society, according to William Deng Deng, chairman of the demobilization commission. That is far less than 1 percent of the number agreed to, and there are fears that the program to turn soldiers into civilians is already grinding to a halt.

According to the 2005 peace agreement, the armies of the north and south were supposed to demobilize large percentages of their forces, which worked out to cutting about 90,000 soldiers on each side. The soldiers were meant to go through a comprehensive program to rejoin society, including financial incentives, academic and vocational training and family assistance, at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars.

But only 10,000 soldiers have even begun the process in the south, and just 20,000 in the north, according to Mr. Deng, leaving a precarious hangover for the country as it heads into referendum season.

Stakeholders have been pointing fingers over whom to blame for what one consultant to the

program called "a joke," and many of those fingers are pointing toward the entity that is supposed to help the effort go smoothly: the [United Nations](#).

The United Nations Development Program administers the money for the work on the ground. But the southern Sudanese government, as well as an internal United Nations memorandum, suggests that the agency is grossly mismanaging the money and may have even intentionally misled donors as to the program's success.

In turn, relations have soured between the agency, the southern Sudanese government and even the United Nations [peacekeeping](#) mission in Sudan.

"It's not working the way it is," says Mr. Deng of the Southern Sudan Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission. "We have a concern with the way they are spending the money.

Like the southern Sudanese, donor nations have asked to see an internal audit on the program, but so far the development agency has refused.

Demobilizing fighters is not simply a matter of accounting. Soldiers from the Sudan People's Liberation Army are spread across the vast hinterland of Sudan. On Dec. 18, a renegade southern Sudanese general was reported to have led an [ambush](#) on his fellow soldiers, killing 20.

But according to the internal United Nations document, much of the money available to prepare soldiers for civilian jobs has been spent on office equipment, staff vehicles and international salaries, many of which were never originally approved.

United Nations officers failed to report 217 separate purchases amounting to more than \$450,000 for items like generators, pickup trucks and 141 laptop computers; 44 laptops were also reported to have disappeared, the internal memorandum found.

On top of these problems, the memorandum noted, the project's 2009 annual report failed to mention that not a single former combatant had completed the reintegration program at that time, raising questions as to whether the project intended to mislead donors.

The memorandum also warns that the demobilization program could be "unsustainable" in 2011 without more money, and that "no contingency plan exists."

The United Nations acknowledged that there were problems and said an independent review was under way.

"It is clear" that the program in south Sudan "is facing many challenges," said Stéphane Dujarric, a spokesman for the Development Program in New York. "This program is operating in a state that is recovering from a long civil war. That has a very significant impact on the results of reintegration."

On the grounds of one demobilization and reintegration camp in Juba, a scattered array of soldiers trickled through a secondary school where courses were being held for soldiers in literacy, computers and vocational training. The last cohort had about 700 soldiers. This month it was 181.

Maj. Alessio Wol, 70, is one of the participants. Many of Sudan's soldiers never received any formal education, Major Wol said, but while the classes, three days a week in the morning, were important, they were not nearly enough. As for educated people like Major Wol, a graduate of Makerere University in Uganda and a medical assistant during the war, he argued that they "don't offer anything."

First he was put in the literacy class, but when he repeatedly told program staff that he "started school in 1945," he says they showed him to a computer class, but that was as useless to him as the last one.

"We are doubting the future," he said.

The substandard management of the program may be endangering security, some contend. According to the internal memorandum, Sudanese soldiers had been offered different amounts of money to disarm, ranging between \$600 in the south and \$200 in the north, causing "discontent" among ex-combatants.

"There are three questions for U.N.D.P.," says Wolf-Christian Paes, a demobilization expert with the Bonn International Center for Conversion, in Juba. "Who is in charge? Where is the money? And how can we make this a better program?"

Mr. Paes said that little of the money was helping the soldiers, and that the plan for the program was unclear. While the program originally had good intentions, he said, its course had gone awry.

"We create parallel systems of government, and we don't build the systems that are supposed to be there," he said. "It's an approach I just don't understand."