A Crisis-Complex, Not Complex Crises: Conflict Dynamics in the Sudan, Chad, and Central African Republic Tri-Border Area[1]

PATRICK BERG

The Darfur conflict in western Sudan, with its millions of refugees, hundreds of thousands of fatalities, and continuous violence against the civilian population has been a matter of concern to the general public since its escalation in autumn 2003. Refugee movements and cross-border raids have also drawn attention to neighboring areas in eastern Chad and the north of the Central African Republic. There has been a dramatic deterioration in the security situation there since the end of 2005, which most observers consider as a territorial spill over of the Darfur conflict.

But this account falls short as an explanation of the crises in the neighboring countries, which were far from peaceful before the outbreak of the Darfur crisis. Both Chad and the Central African Republic have been in a state of crisis almost incessantly since gaining their independence from French colonial rule in the 1960s. What may now be observed in the border areas of the three countries, therefore, is not the extension of *one* conflict, but rather the increasing intertwining of three individual conflicts, each with its own causes and history, into a highly complex crisis system.

Chad: A Ruinous Struggle for the State Apparatus

Chad has been in permanent crisis since independence from the French colonial power in 1960. A whole series of authoritarian regimes have succeeded one another, with change generally being effected by a military coup. Every one of these regimes was characterized by an absolute concentration of power in the person of the president and a small – mostly ethnically homogenous – leadership clique. This exclusion of other

---

1. This article is an abridged and updated version of the study »The Dynamics of Conflict in the Tri-Border Region of the Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic,« Bonn: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (2008).

population strata from sharing in the national wealth inevitably gave rise to resistance. As a consequence, not only is a nationally oriented social and economic policy lacking, but a repressive state apparatus has emerged that will not brook any form of opposition.

Given the clear discrimination along ethnic lines initial efforts towards reform of the political system rapidly lost all meaning. Instead, the growing military struggle between the different ethnic groups for control of the state apparatus came to the fore, while its repressive nature was no longer put in question. The brutal civil war of the early 1980s, finally, reinforced a long-standing division in Chadian society, dating back to French colonial times, between the predominantly sedentary groups in the fertile southwest and the semi-nomadic cattle farmers who dominated the rest of the country. However, the enthusiasm of all sections of the Chadian population for the democratic reforms implemented in the wake of the last changeover of power in 1989 indicates that this division derives more from the maneuvering of power-hungry elites than from substantively differing views.

President Idriss Deby, who came to power promising democratization, has dashed such hopes several times in the intervening 18 years. The arbitrary distribution of privileges and the attendant lack of any kind of certainty, even for the country's elites, has paralyzed the economy and intensified the struggle for state resources as the sole reliable source of economic gain. The commencement of oil production in 2003 and the associated windfall for the state's coffers only served to further aggravate the lust for wealth and eventually fractured even the closest circle around President Deby. Scarcely a year later entire units of the presidential guard deserted and high-ranking government members set up their own rebel movements, which have since carried out several – some almost successful – coup attempts.

The activities of these rebel movements is one reason for the dramatic deterioration in the security situation in the east of the country, on the border with Darfur. The region has been an area of operations for rebel groups for decades because the scarcely governable border offers every opportunity for a rapid withdrawal into neighboring Sudan. Deby himself launched his 1989 coup from Darfur. Another cause of the violence is the decades-long neglect of the region's economic development, which, in the face of progressive devastation and incessant population growth, has resulted in ever intensifying conflicts for ever scarcer resources. In the wake of the deterioration of Chadian-Sudanese relations (see below),

from 2005 cross-border raids on Chadian villages carried out by Janjaweed militias close to Khartoum multiplied. After the Chadian army, occupied with repulsing the rebels threatening the regime, had refused to station troops in the region to protect the population local self-defense groups were formed. Against the background of the above-mentioned struggle for scarce resources in the region, however, these »protection forces« rapidly became embroiled in local conflicts. While raids by the Sudanese Janjaweed diminished, purely Chadian disputes escalated into targeted assaults on the civilian population of neighboring ethnic groups, which so far have driven more than 180 000 people from their villages.

The Central African Republic: Aftermath of a Coup

The Central African Republic, too, has been characterized by a series of autocratic regimes and often violent changeovers of power since independence. Even more than comparable countries in the region the Central African Republic has had to contend with a lack of infrastructure and largely absent state authority outside the capital city. While still a French colony today's Republic was unable to cover the costs of an administrative machinery from its own resources and until today it remains dependent upon direct aid from foreign donors to stop up the most pressing holes in the state budget. France in particular has maintained its influence over its former colony even after independence by means of such and other forms of aid. The extent of this influence can be inferred from the fact, for example, that so far in the country's history no change of government has taken place without France's consent or even active interference. The record of these governments is sobering, however. Instead of furthering the country's development a series of kleptocratic regimes have enriched themselves from national resources and through their rivalries have set against one another ethnic groups that once lived peacefully side by side – even if the divisions are not as deep as in neighboring Chad.

The current crisis can largely be traced back to internal conflicts resulting from the military coup of 2003, when current President Bozizé overthrew the government of his predecessor Patassé with substantial support from neighboring countries and from France. Bozizé, former army chief under Patassé, did not come to power on the back of a national rebel movement but recruited a mercenary army with grandiose promises. The

latter, disappointed by rewards that had failed to materialize after the successful coup, began systematically to plunder the civilian population, which was only brought to an end with the help of Chadian troops. The losers from the coup, Patassé's supporters on the one hand and the dissatisfied soldiers on the other, withdrew into the north of the country and there formed a whole series of rebel groups. The rebels gained recruits in particular after the election in 2005 confirmed Bozizé in office, and in the same year there were numerous assaults on army establishments in the northwest of the country. In order to put down the insurgents Bozizé sent his presidential guard into the region which implemented a scorched earth strategy and brutally suppressed the civilian population, driving 300 000 people from their villages in the course of a few weeks.

Sudan: More than Just Darfur

When the Darfur conflict in western Sudan came to the world's attention, in the south of the country the conclusion of a peace agreement to end the decades-long conflict between the central government in Khartoum and the SPLM rebels was imminent. In order not to jeopardize the progress made in the south the mediators deliberately chose not to include the newly inflamed center of conflict in the negotiations. The hesitancy with which the so-called Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), finally signed in January 2005, has been implemented, subject to constant setbacks, leads one to believe that this was a serious mistake, not only for Darfur, but also for the south. The two crises are far from being unrelated, purely regional phenomena but are symptoms of one and the same basic conflict affecting all parts of the country. What is at issue here is a conflict that dates back to the colonial period and has flared up more or less openly since independence in 1955 between a small power elite in the center of the country and the repressed and marginalized majority of the population that is denied any kind of participation in national prosperity or political decision-making.

The imminent conclusion of the CPA led to fears among the excluded regions and actors that they would lose out once more and contributed – not only in Darfur – to an escalation of the violence. In Darfur, first, two rebel movements were founded, the SLM (Sudan Liberation Movement), named after the south Sudanese rebel movement the SPLM, and the JEM (Justice and Equality Movement), which drew attention to themselves by

means of direct attacks on government and military establishments. The central government in Khartoum largely deployed local militias to quell the rebellion, who were promised modern weapons, the opportunity to plunder, and absolute immunity from prosecution. These so-called Janjaweed militias proceeded systematically, often in tandem with the Sudanese army, against the civilian population, laid waste thousands of villages, and have driven millions of people from their homeland.

Complex System of Conflict in the Tri-Border Area

This brief overview of the background to the conflicts in Chad, the Central African Republic, and Darfur makes two things clear: First of all, the current problems in the region are no new development, but the continuation of earlier crises whose causes go far back into the past. Moreover, the outbreaks of violence witnessed since 2005 in Chad and the Central African Republic are not merely the spill over of the Darfur conflict, but an escalation of existing conflicts there. These originally separate conflicts have in the meantime become so closely intertwined, however, that in their current form they can be understand only in terms of a common system of conflicts.

The close networks of ethnic groups that live astride current borders are playing an important role in this process of intertwining. Darfur – like the present-day territory of Chad – was for centuries a meeting place for nomadic peoples, but at the same time a territory upon which the surrounding big powers wanted to impose their claims to power. Whether it was Libya, Sudan, or Egypt, all laid claim to the area as their own hinterland. The result is a colorful mixture of ethnic groups that maintain close economic and cultural relations with the former big powers – and naturally with their kindred in the region in particular.

A curious hybrid situation has developed: On the one hand, the people there live their lives heedless of modern borders that in any case are largely incomprehensible in the desert sands, and move freely between the places of residence of their kindred scattered around various states; on the other hand, state institutions are compelled to heed these borders which therefore offer a certain protection to dissidents and rebels in neighboring states against pursuit by the governments of their homelands. With the end of the colonial period the region changed from an area of passage for nomads to an area of retreat for rebel groups.

As already mentioned, Idriss Deby's seizure of power was prepared in Darfur, with massive support from the National Congress Party (NCP) that had recently come to power in Khartoum. The Sudanese government could therefore rely on Deby's gratitude in ensuing years and the two governments long maintained friendly relations. When the rebellion began in Darfur in 2002 and the SLM and the JEM sought allies among their Chadian kindred, Khartoum expected that Deby would put a stop to the activities of Sudanese rebels on Chadian soil. At first, he tried to satisfy their expectations. As self-styled mediator he managed to arrange armistice agreements in September 2003 and April 2004. Deby's neutral appearance rapidly lost its sparkle, however, since in the background he was working to divide the rebel groups and, according to some reports, even took military action against them. As a result, the SLM and the JEM rejected a continuing mediating role for Chad and were able to bring about a transfer of the peace negotiations to the AU.

At the same time, Deby was coming under pressure domestically. The innermost leadership in Chad, which, like a large part of the Darfur rebels belong to the Zaghawa ethnic group, considered it their duty to stand by their Sudanese kindred and were unable to comprehend Deby's caution in this regard. They not only used their channels in the Chadian army to support the JEM and the SLM directly, but also began to work towards Deby's removal, who in any case had made himself unpopular with his plans for a change in the constitution that would allow him to serve a further term of office. Finally, Deby also fell out of favor with the Sudanese government due to his inability to control the Chadian Zaghawa. As a result, Khartoum began to support existing Chadian rebel groups with the clear aim of bringing to power a more amenable regime in N'djamena. Deby, whose position had in the meantime become considerably weakened through desertions from the army and the presidential guard, changed course and began to support the SLM and, in particular, the JEM with weapons and training camps on Chadian territory.

As a consequence, Deby and Bashir went from being allies to bitter enemies. Regime change in N'djamena is essential to Khartoum's strategy of a military solution to the Darfur crisis in order to cut the rebels off from support and areas of retreat. The Sudanese government has deployed considerable resources in pursuit of this aim: In April 2006 and last in February 2008 the rebels stood at the gates of the Chadian capital and Deby was close to being overthrown, in each case involving different rebel groups equipped by Khartoum. Deby's support for the Darfur rebels, in

contrast, is part of a survival strategy. On the one hand, his new line enabled him to win at least part of the Chadian Zaghawa back to his side, while on the other hand, the Darfur rebels are conscious of the significance of their »Chadian connection« and so in their own interests are quite willing to stand by Deby – as in the attempted coup of 2006 – in his struggle against the Chadian rebel groups.

The porosity of borders in the region described above also applies to the Central African Republic, in particular since the national security forces are not remotely capable of controlling or protecting them. Both the SPLM and the northern Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) have found refuge in the extreme east of the Central African Republic without asking permission from the government in Bangui. In the Patassé era the Sudanese army attacked the SPLM in southern Sudan from Central African territory and in April 2006 finally Chadian rebels passed through the northeast of the country on the way to their coup attempt in Chad from Darfur.

It is remarkable that the conflicting parties from the neighboring countries use the area merely as an area of passage and retreat without getting involved in events inside the Central African Republic. Exceptional in this respect are the Chadian soldiers who stayed on after their decisive role in Bozizé's seizure of power and have assumed an active role in national rebel movements. Furthermore, Chad's President Deby continues to exert a strong influence on his Central African colleague, who owes his ascent to power to him.

Even though regional protagonists have engaged in numerous cross-border activities conflicts in the Central African Republic have for the most part remained within national borders. Central African groups do not bring specific influence to bear on developments in neighboring countries, nor do groups there get involved in the Central African Republic.

Collateral Damage: »Side Effects« of International Politics

The three conflicts – in particular the two in Chad and Sudan – have in the meantime knitted together in the closest possible way so that they are contributing to their mutual continuance. The Darfur conflict has led to direct rivalry between Bashir and Deby in which both envisage their own retention of power as conditional on the fall of the other. The Sudanese backed coup attempts of 2006 and February 2008, as well as the attack

on Khartoum organized with Chadian assistance in May 2008 constitute convincing evidence of this. The strategy being pursued by both regimes of weakening their opponent by supporting their internal opponents is contributing to the continuation of national crises, which in turn confirms the relevant governments in their plans for regime change in the neighboring country. If this vicious circle is to be disrupted the conflicts on both sides of the border must be understood as a common system that can only be dealt with simultaneously.

Alongside the direct interests of the conflicting parties and the participating neighboring states, however, a series of other factors must be taken into consideration in an analysis of the crisis in the tri-border area. These consist for the most part of the overriding strategic interests of regional and international actors, the local effects of which are not necessarily always conducive to a peaceful solution of the conflicts there. Given their larger context these factors cannot be addressed in detail here, but the following brief examples should help to shed light on the complexity of the conflict and the multitude of elements that must be taken into account by any realistic attempt at a solution.

Egypt and Libya are trying to establish themselves as hegemonic powers in the region and by torpedoing one another's peace efforts in pursuit of this strategy also undermine the joint efforts of the un and the African Union (au). Another struggle for influence in the region may be observed between France, the usa, and China, who have brought their global competition for mineral and other resources with them to Africa. Political aims concerning resolution of the conflicts must often take second place to the struggle for new concessions for the exploitation of sought-after resources. For example, in 2005 the us-dominated World Bank barely protested when the Chadian government broke an agreement on the use of oil revenues and financed weapons purchases instead of social expenditure. For its part China rewarded the establishment of diplomatic relations in August 2006 with loans worth several million and was rewarded in turn with concessions in the oil sector. France is attempting to halt its ongoing loss of importance in the whole region of francophone Africa by means of the soldiers it has stationed there – for example, facilitating the defense against the rebel groups outside (and inside) N'djamena by making strategic aerial pictures available to the Deby government in 2006 and 2008.

The so-called War against Terror is as much of a priority in us foreign policy as access to raw materials. On this basis, for example, the Chadian

army involved in the civil war receives training and equipment assistance from the USA in order to prepare it for the struggle against Islamic terrorism. The CIA also uses the aim of fighting terror to justify its close co-operation with the Sudanese secret service which, alongside archive material on Osama bin Laden's time in Sudan, apparently provides current information from countries such as Iraq and Somalia. In this way the USA is putting itself in a dependent relationship which renders its official policy of threatening Sudan with stricter sanctions scarcely credible.

Last but not least, Eritrea should be mentioned which is playing a considerable role in the Darfur conflict. For several years Asmara has maintained very close relations with almost all the Sudanese rebel groups, facilitated their access to military training camps, and permitted the opening of political bureaus. Eritrea, which feels betrayed by the international community in the border dispute with Ethiopia, and is becoming increasingly isolated in the region, now needs its contacts with the Darfur rebels in order to demonstrate its significance in international circles. As a result, developments in the Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict may well bring about potential threats to efforts towards a peace agreement in Darfur.

International Peace Efforts:
Unable to See the Wood for the Trees

A lasting peaceful solution to the crisis in the region can be found only if its complex regional and international connections are recognized and addressed within the framework of a comprehensive strategy. Unfortunately, so far that is not the case. The international community has instead tended to single out one aspect of the complex conflict constellation and attempted to deal with it separately from the other factors.

Serious peace efforts began in the region in 2001 when the regional organization IGAD (Intergovernmental Agency on Development) – with substantial support from the USA, the UK, and Norway – assumed the role of mediator in the civil war between northern and southern Sudan. The mediators took the decision that only the two largest parties to the conflict, the government and the SPLM, should be represented at the negotiating table. Not only did they fail to see that the two groups were in no way representative of their respective regions, but in particular that the north-south conflict is only one manifestation of a much bigger conflict between center and periphery. A peace treaty that concentrated on the

south, however, would not solve the deficiencies in other marginalized territories of the country, but only serve to make them stand out more. In the end it is not surprising, therefore, that the apparent success of the north-south talks reinforced existing frustrations in other neglected areas and – as in, for example, Darfur, but also in the east of Sudan and to some extent in Kordofan too – contributed to the outbreak or intensification of armed rebellions there.

With the signing of the CPA in January 2005, however, the attention of the international community shifted to Darfur. The atrocities perpetrated by Janjaweed and the Sudanese army in Darfur had mobilized a broad coalition of civil society organizations, particularly in the USA, which demanded that their government seek a rapid solution to the crisis. In September 2004 the then US Secretary of State Colin Powell for the first time took up the language of the activists and categorized the crimes in Darfur as genocide. Shortly afterwards the UN Security Council appointed a committee of investigation whose report in January 2005 – soon after the signing of the CPA – confirmed the worst human rights violations in Darfur. While the CPA and the rapidly emerging problems with its implementation receded from view, more than a dozen states participated in the Abuja peace negotiations on Darfur as observers and tried to influence the talks outside the official sessions. While there was agreement that the arrangements of the CPA should not be infringed by the Darfur peace treaty in order not to jeopardize what had been achieved so far, this piecemeal approach once more obstructed from view the conflict's larger context.

After the failure of the Darfur peace negotiations[2] the efforts of the international community were concentrated on the restoration of at least rudimentary security for the civilian population in Darfur. The already deployed, but insufficient mission of the African Union, AMIS, was to be replaced by a larger and more robust peace mission which was to ensure protection of the civilian population even without the agreement of the conflicting parties. Due to the vehement opposition of the Sudanese government almost two years passed between the initial idea in spring 2006 and AMIS's official handing over to the successor mission UNAMID, led

---

2. Only one of the three rebel factions participating in the negotiations (the SLM faction under Minni Minnawi) signed the Darfur peace treaty with the government in spring 2006. The rejection of the agreement by the other rebel groups rendered implementation impossible.

jointly by the AU and the UN in January 2008, while all their other efforts to settle the conflict receded into the background. Despite the long period of preparation UNAMID lacked a large part of the envisaged troops and materiel from the start and to this day has barely exceeded the personnel levels of its predecessor mission.

Chad: The »Simpler Darfur«?

The delays in bringing UNAMID up to strength can be attributed to two factors. On the one hand, the Sudanese government is resisting the stationing of international troops in Darfur and engaging in tactical maneuvers – such as the broad rejection of non-African troop providers – and the creation of bureaucratic obstacles in the granting of entry visas and the customs clearing of humanitarian supplies to torpedo establishment of the mission. On the other hand, because of the catastrophic security situation in Darfur potential troop providers fear losses among their own ranks without really being able to help pacify the region. At the same time, politicians, particularly in the Western world, are under strong public pressure to support the people affected by the conflict in the region.

Against this background French foreign minister Kouchner instituted another shift in international – and in particular European – attention by committing himself to the dispatch of an EU military mission to protect Sudanese refugees in eastern Chad and the Central African Republic. On the one hand, this gave the impression of lending vigorous support to Darfur without, however, the danger of military intervention on the ground – for example, within the framework of the planned UNAMID. On the other hand, it made it possible to distribute the political responsibility and also the financial costs of the French military involvement in the region upon broader international shoulders. At the level of the UN France had already made the corresponding approaches. A report presented in December 2006 by the then UN General Secretary Kofi Annan, however, had spoken out clearly against sending a UN mission. Annan justified his recommendation primarily on the basis of the lack of a credible political process in Chad and the Central African Republic, without which a military mission had no prospect of improving the situation long term and might even become a party to the conflict.

Within the framework of a larger overall plan, taking into account both the internal political situation in Chad and the Central African Republic

and the complex regional conflict constellation including Sudan, an international mission would certainly contribute to a settlement of the crisis. However, MINURCAT (»Mission des Nations Unies en République Centrafricaine et au Tchad«) as finally pushed through by France does not meet these requirements. The mandate of the mission contains no political components and important elements, such as monitoring of the Sudanese-Chadian border region, were left out under pressure from the Chadian government. While such monitoring would undoubtedly have made a significant contribution to reducing arms smuggling and so improved the security situation, it would also have interfered with the movements of the Darfur rebels supported by Deby.

Instead of the usual UN blue helmets a European security component was agreed upon, too. Given the existing presence of troops stationed on the ground this was largely to consist of French soldiers, which facilitates privileged access to decision-makers for the Chadian government. As a result, the EUFOR (European Union Force) mission came under suspicion, even before its deployment, of wishing rather to stabilize the Deby regime than to help protect the civilian population. Initial reports seem to confirm this fear: During the last coup attempt by Chadian rebels in May 2008 the French army provided Deby with satellite photographs of rebel movements and, together with Libya, managed to arrange the transportation of new munitions to N'djamena. At the same time, neither EUFOR nor its political leadership in Brussels wasted many words on the wave of arrests of members of the civilian opposition that shortly ensued, in the course of which even the chair of one of the political dialogues between opposition and government sponsored by the EU Commission disappeared without trace.

Learning to See the Wood: The Prospects of International Peace Efforts

The attempts by the international community to contribute to resolving the crises in the region were fairly unsuccessful, particularly after the outbreak of rebellion in Darfur. The serious will – and also public pressure – to do »something« to end the conflict, in view of the humanitarian suffering, all too frequently ended in hasty actionism without a prior, realistic examination of the effectiveness of the measures taken. The development of future strategies must therefore also be based on a critical assessment of

measures taken in the past. Three central deficiencies of international efforts can clearly be recognized: first of all, the isolated view on individual hot spots; secondly the lack of cooperation between the numerous actors involved; and, finally, the primacy of military solutions.

The first step on the way towards a practicable strategy, accordingly, would be recognition of the interconnections between the different conflicts and a detailed study of their contexts. Building on that, an overall strategy should be developed for the region that at the same time addresses different focal points – implementation of the CPA, the search for a peaceful solution to the Darfur conflict, consideration of other marginalized regions and groups in Sudan, and finally a critical look at the structural problems of Chad's political system.

The advantage of a comprehensive regional strategy for the regional conflicts lies, among other things, in the fact that it sends an unambiguous signal from the international community to the groups involved in the various individual conflicts. The prerequisite for this to happen, however, is that the numerous actors in the international arena agree on a common approach. Instead, however, efforts by governments and international organizations have thus far been influenced by particularistic interests as well as domestic political pressure creating the need to demonstrate rapid action. These factors have not only distracted attention from the real goal of peace in the region, but have made it possible, due to the veritable cacophony of offers of mediation, for the conflicting parties to circumvent potential pressure from the international community. Accordingly, what is needed is a realignment of international efforts for a peaceful solution to the conflicts in the tri-border area. Of particular importance in this respect is to integrate all actors in a common structure and not, for example, to equate the international community with the western world. China, Libya, Eritrea, the African Union, and the Arab League may be difficult partners for the West, but a lasting solution to the region's problems is inconceivable without them.

If such a common approach is to be implemented the existing architecture of international peace efforts must be urgently revised. Alongside the many individual initiatives there is a whole series of coordination forums which, though their memberships partly overlap, never coincide. In contrast, a single coordination group, involving all central actors and with a clear leadership structure, would be desirable. The replacement of the fairly unsuccessful AU/UN dual leadership of the Darfur peace efforts in July 2008 by former foreign minister of Burkina Faso Djibril Yipènè

Bassolé as sole joint chief mediator is certainly a step in this direction. The decisive extension of the task of mediation to the regional conflict complex has not yet been achieved, however.

Another challenge for Bassolé is to persuade the international community to return to the primacy of a political solution to the crisis and a realistic assessment of the limited possibilities of international military missions in the ongoing conflicts. Experiences with AMIS and UNAMID show that a peace mission stationed against the will of all conflicting parties not only cannot achieve its aims, but also will itself be sucked into the conflict. The task and possibilities of the different missions in the region must therefore be evaluated. The will towards a peaceful solution cannot be forced upon the conflicting parties by a military mission, but must rather be the result of political efforts at persuasion. This political work must be acknowledged in the mandates of UNAMID and MINURCAT, because without the political will of the actors these missions will be unable to afford the civilian population the desired protection.

Decisive for international cooperation will be how the proceedings instigated against the Sudanese president by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) are handled. In July 2008 the ICJ's chief prosecutor submitted a request for the issuing of an arrest warrant for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes, on which the judges must now decide. While this met with a positive reaction from human rights organizations the responses of the international community have varied between muted and disapproving. The African Union and the Arab League have called for the suspension of the proceedings and even UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon has expressed concerns about their possible effect on the Darfur peace process. Interestingly, since publication of the proceedings there has been an increase in national initiatives towards settling the Darfur conflict in Sudan, in which opposition parties have been actively involved by the government. Even if it is too early to assess the seriousness of these efforts the government is certainly taking the ICJ proceedings seriously – which means that the international community can use them to exert pressure with some hope of success. It is important, on the one hand, not to bring into question the ICJ's integrity, and on the other, to develop and maintain a unified position towards the Sudanese government. The EU in particular, which strongly supported the establishment of the ICJ, could play an important role in developing such a position.

It is vital for the peace efforts in all three countries that the autocratic, even dictatorial character of the regimes be understood as fundamental

causes of the conflict. Efforts towards a political solution must therefore not be confined to agreements on power sharing between the different armed actors, since they would leave the structural problems unresolved and make a resumption of violence likely. History shows that the mere involvement of opposition forces in government in Chad and Sudan is not enough if the political system does not provide for the consideration of different interests in decision-making. Institutional questions must not only be taken into account in the negotiations and the resulting agreements, but must also be paid particular attention in the implementation phase. Therefore, the reinforcement of important national monitoring bodies and particularly the parliament should be among the tasks of the international community in this phase. Support for and integration of genuinely democratizing forces are also essential within the framework of any attempted political conflict solution. While the regimes themselves have no interest in the democratization of their societies, movements within the political opposition or civil society in the region are subjected to severe restrictions, even torture and political assassination. External support can offer some degree of protection, however, and open up some freedom for critical debate. At the center of such debates might well lie the search for a positive vision of a common future, something which is currently lacking in all three countries.