

Mr. Nafie Goes to Washington

Eric Reeves, May 2, 2013

There has been a good deal of understandable outrage at the decision by the Obama administration to invite to Washington Nafie Ali Nafie, senior advisor to President Omar al-Bashir of the Khartoum regime. Al-Bashir himself could not be invited, of course, because he has been indicted by the International Criminal Court for genocide and crimes against humanity in Darfur, crimes in which Nafie is deeply complicit and for which he bears major responsibility. But al-Bashir's voice and that of others in the National Islamic Front/National Congress Party regime will be well represented by Nafie. Indeed, like other members of the regime already indicted by the ICC—including Defense Minister and former Interior Minister Abdel Rahim Mohamed Hussein—Nafie's own future lies in The Hague if justice is done. His central role in orchestrating the Darfur genocide is well known, indeed is acknowledged by Nafie himself.

There are other reasons for incomprehension at the Obama administration's decision to invite Nafie. Such a meeting in Washington is an extraordinary reward to a regime that is guilty of serial genocide: in the Nuba Mountains in the 1990s, in the oil regions along the North/South border from 1998 to 2002, and in Darfur, where vast ethnically-targeted violence broke out in 2003 and continues to this day. We must wonder with Congressman Frank Wolf:

- "In a letter to President Barack Obama, Wolf said that he was not opposed to diplomacy but that talks could take place at other locations such as the US embassy in Khartoum. 'With Darfur worsening and continued indiscriminate attacks on civilians in the Nuba mountains displacing thousands, why would your administration reward Khartoum with an invitation to Washington?' Wolf wrote." (Agence France-Presse [Washington], May 1, 2013)

Indeed, the invitation of Nafie is perhaps the most dismaying decision U.S. officials could have made. Among other things, it gives him a leg up in his competition with First Vice President Ali Osman Taha to succeed al-Bashir, who is very ill with throat cancer. *Africa Confidential* (26 April 2013, Vol. 54 - No. 9) has very recently provided a superb overview of the dynamics of this competition, something that certainly should have figured in the Obama administration's choice of interlocutors. Moreover, while Nafie may well have the ear of al-Bashir, his own actions and attitudes must make us wonder further about what guided the process of invitation.

Nafie was head of Khartoum's ruthless security services, for example, when Khartoum orchestrated an assassination attempt against Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa (1995); various investigations made clear Nafie's role, and the Egyptians insisted that he be removed from his position, which he was, though this was only a minor speed-bump in gaining ascendancy within the regime. As head of security he presided over countless arrests, extra-judicial executions...and torture. Some have described his presence during torture sessions as surreally calm—the *Los Angeles Times* reported on an interview conducted with Nafie in Khartoum (October 2008), in the course of which a torture incident was discussed:

"'[Nafie] was my interrogator,' said Farouk Mohammed Ibrahim, a former University of Khartoum science professor and government critic who was arrested in 1989 and held in one of Sudan's notorious, secret 'ghost houses' for 12 days. 'I was tortured, beaten, flogged in his presence,' Ibrahim said. '[Nafie] was administering the whole thing. He did it all in such a cool manner, as if he were sipping a coffee.' In his characteristic style, Nafie expressed no regrets, saying opposition activists at the time were planning counter-coups and civil war. 'We were there to protect ourselves,' he said with a shrug. 'Definitely we were not there to play cards with them.'" ([Los Angeles Times \[Khartoum\], October 26, 2008](#))

More consequentially, if just as brutally, Nafie—more than any other senior NIF/NCP official—has charted the ongoing course of the Darfur genocide following the death of Majzoub al-Khalifa in June 2007. Khalifa had represented Khartoum all too effectively in the Abuja talks that yielded the exceedingly misguided and destructive "Darfur Peace Agreement" (2006). (At the same time it should be noted that over the past two years senior military and security officials within the regime have achieved increasing power, especially in decisions about war and peace.) All this comes against the backdrop of the deep division within the regime between Nafie and Taha.

In short, the Obama administration has provided an extraordinary reward to a regime that craves nothing so much as legitimacy, and to a man who is utterly ruthless and savagely cruel—and who may well trade on this visit in asserting himself as al-Bashir's successor. For Khartoum's chief foreign policy goal, certainly in its bilateral relations with Washington, is removal from the U.S. State Department's list of terrorism-sponsoring nations. And perhaps an additional gift awaits Nafie. But let's be clear about who will be the bearer of this gift, about the man who is already celebrating having been selected to make such a high-profile trip to Washington. Larry Adre, "the top State Department official on Sudan," is simply being disingenuous in claiming that "we do not view this visit as a reward, but as a continuation of a dialogue on issues of concern to the U.S. government" (Agence France-Presse [Washington, DC], May 1, 2013). And the "dialogue" must "continue" in Washington precisely why, Mr. Adre? And how is not a "reward" when it is so desperately desired by the Khartoum regime?

Part of the quid pro quo, which we will see only partially, no doubt included the demand that Khartoum negotiate with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army-North (SPLM/A-N), the rebel movement that is fighting Khartoum's tyranny in South Kordofan and Blue Nile. And a few days ago talks did begin, only to collapse almost immediately because of Khartoum's bad faith; but Nafie's visit remains on track.

Abyei also remains an unresolved flashpoint of renewed conflict, an issue on which we might have expected more cooperation from the regime (accepting the fully endorsed African Union proposal would be a good start); and yet as things stand, major fighting between South Sudan and Khartoum could easily be re-ignited. Notably, it was Nafie who declared for the regime that the Abyei self-determination referendum would not take place as scheduled (January 9, 2011) by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2005). Subsequent tensions and Arab militia violence led to Khartoum's military seizure of Abyei in May 2011, and subsequently to the regime's assaults on South Kordofan (June 5, 2011) and Blue Nile (September 1, 2011). Fighting continues, and displacement is massive. Hundreds of thousands of people face starvation in the two regions, and yet Nafie and his colleagues have remained adamant for almost two years in obstructing all international humanitarian relief aid to civilians in rebel-controlled areas.

But during Nafie's time in Washington we may also wish to focus on his record of anti-Semitism, which typically takes the form of anti-Zionism and a railing against the "Jewish lobby" in the United States. This is certainly well known to the Obama administration; indeed, former U.S. charge d'affaires in Khartoum, Alberto Fernandez, spoke bluntly about Nafie in a "wiki-leaked" cable of March 3, 2009:

- "Senior Presidential Advisor Nafie Ali Nafie, the hardline NCP Secretary for Political Affairs who holds the Darfur portfolio within the Sudanese Government, accused [SLA leader Abdel Wahid] Al Nur of planting Sudanese in Israel to convert them to Judaism and to effect a normalization of relations between Khartoum and Jerusalem. 'Opening an office in Israel is material proof that the Darfur crisis is manipulated by foreign hands and the Jewish lobby,' said Nafie." (**US embassy cable** - 08KHARTOUM340, at Wikileaks.org)

Of course Nafie has much company within the regime; an earlier cable provides a revealing account of the views of Defense Minister Hussein:

- "On July 26 the Arabic pro-government *Al-Rai' Al-Aam* reprinted an interview with Sudanese Minister of Defense Abdelrahim Hussein in which he claims that 24 Jewish organizations are provoking the conflict in Darfur. In the article, reprinted from an earlier interview from the influential Saudi newspaper *Al-Ukaz*, Hussein claims 'holocaust groups' have penetrated tribes in Darfur, carried out a propaganda campaign, and used their political and financial power to influence decision makers." (July 29, 2007, "wikileaks" cable from U.S. embassy in Khartoum, UNCLAS KHARTOUM 001174, at Wikileaks.org)

But it is when he speaks for himself and the regime that Nafie is most revealing:

- "[We have] been monitoring the movements of the forces of evil and aggression represented by American imperialism, world Zionism, and neo-colonialism that are trying to eradicate the cultures of people, plunder their wealth and conquer their will." (*Sudan Tribune*, March 3, 2012)

- "Nafie further accused Israel of transporting Darfurian refugees to South Sudan's military camps for training before to send them to wage war in Darfur against the government troops. 'Jewish and Western circles want to make Darfur a dagger in the heart of the country to hinder its march towards renaissance and progress,' he said." (*Sudan Tribune*, May 20, 2012)
- "'Zionist institutions inside the United States and elsewhere . . . are exploiting the latest economic decisions to destabilize the security and political situation,' the state-linked Sudanese Media Centre quoted presidential assistant Nafie Ali Nafie as saying. Nafie said the government had evidence of collusion between rebel groups in Darfur, politicians in arch-foe South Sudan and Zionist institutions in the United States to sabotage Sudan. He did not present the evidence." (Reuters [Khartoum], July 1, 2012)
- "Presidential assistant Nafie Ali Nafie ruled out the conclusion of a peace agreement with JEM and the Sudan Liberation Movement led by Abdel Wahid Al-Nur. 'They want that Darfur issue remains unresolved to use it as a means of public action by the opposition coalition or the Zionist lobbies to change the regime,' Nafie said." (*Sudan Tribune*, June 4, 2011)
- "The Sudanese presidential assistant Nafie Ali Nafie on Saturday said that his country is in possession of evidence proving the involvement of external players including Jewish groups and neighbouring South Sudan in attempts to exploit the country's recent austerity decisions to create domestic instability." (*Sudan Tribune*, June 30, 2012)
- "Nafie also lashed out at the French government and dismissed its proposal to resolve the International Criminal Court row. The French role in supporting the charges against Al-Bashir is a result of the growing Zionist influence in France. 'I see no taste or smell or use from the so-called French initiative,' [Nafie] said." (*Sudan Tribune* [Paris], August 17, 2008)
- "Dr. Nafie pointed out that the government exerted all efforts to make the secession peaceful, but the SPLM and the Zionist lobby work together to hinder that." (Sudan News Agency [SUNA], August 20, 2011)

And of course there are a great many other examples of similar tenor.

There is no satisfactory answer to the question of why Nafie was invited by the Obama administration, and why *now*. At the very least the Obama administration should have secured beforehand from Khartoum explicit and detailed commitment to allow the creation of humanitarian corridors into the Nuba Mountains of South Kordofan and Blue Nile, with clear and painful consequences for any renegeing on such agreement. Certainly massive displacement and vast suffering will continue until such corridors are secured. Instead, without securing any visible concessions of consequence, the U.S. has invited for discussions a virulently anti-Semitic *génocidaire* with ties to terrorism (not only did he play a central role in the Mubarak assassination attempt—an act of terrorism—but he cozied up to Osama bin Laden during his years in Khartoum, formative for al-Qaeda).

Those who have held out hope that the U.S. might move beyond the misguided policies of appeasement so consistently promoted by former Obama special envoys Scott Gration and Princeton Lyman must be sorely disappointed.