

## US Envoy Gration and his 'Cookies and honey' Strategy for Sudan

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October 26, 2009: Moments following Obama's spectacular electoral victory speech, I phoned JEM commanders in Darfur to relay to them fresh news of the US Election results. A commander at the other end of the phone responded: "We followed the great news as well and our troops are all celebrating at this very moment; the IDPs and the Refugees too were up the whole night listening to their transistor radios".

Obama's victory unleashed a powerful spirit of hope and optimism in Darfur as indeed across the world. "Obama" became the preferred and most common name among newborns in Darfur IDP and Refugee camps, a choice that had previously been reserved for "Khalil" (JEM), "Abdelwahid" (SLM) and "Ocampo" (ICC). Sadly speaking, the Obama euphoria in Darfur and the ecstatic hope that came with it were short lived. The fad of Obama's name simply dissipated. No prize for guessing as to why that happened. The answer is simple. It is Gration.

Numerous commentators have expressed worry that Envoy Gration has totally lost direction and fallen foul to manipulation by the GoS. The President of JEM too declared that the Envoy is working without any specific strategy and has turned himself into a public relations officer for the Khartoum government. I for one argue that Envoy Gration does have a strategy and a clear one as well. It is called Cookies and Honey strategy:

"We have got think about giving out cookies . Kids, countries – they react to gold stars, smiley faces, handshakes, agreements, talk, engagements... You catch more bears with honey than with vinegar", he declared.

Overlooking the insulting, patronising and racist overtones of the statement, it does show how the Envoy plans to engage the Government of Sudan and that is a strategy nonetheless. Gration's problem is that he genuinely believes in a path that almost everybody else recognises as flawed. Ever since his appointment to the job, Gration has been dispensing his cookies but is yet to get anything in return.

The problem with Gration's strategy is that it stands at odds with what made Obama popular across Sudan, from the south to Darfur. Declarations made by US President Obama and his senior staff show just that. During his presidential election campaign, President Elect Obama promised that if he became a president, he would take: "immediate steps to end genocide in Darfur by increasing pressure on the Sudanese and pressuring the Sudanese government to halt the killing and stop impeding deployment of a robust international force".

The gist of Obama's message was also echoed by others among his top staff. Thus Secretary of State Clinton called publicly for a policy of a no fly zone in Darfur while Ambassador Susan Rice referred to the use of bombing to stop the Khartoum killings

in Darfur. These statements are far away from the ‘cookies and honey’ stance of Envoy Gration.

There can be no doubt that the ‘cookies and honey’ have endeared Gration to the Khartoum government. Not without some level of naivety, Gration often prides himself in having access to the Khartoum government and lauds his personal friendship with Al-bashir’s Envoy to Darfur Ghazi Salahuddin. Big deal! In some ways, Gration’s work has paid off. In one of his government stage-managed visits to Darfur, Gration was:

“...greeted like a rock star by hundreds of cheering Bashir supporters in a conference hall plastered with posters of Bashir and Obama, poorly photo-shopped together”.

Al-bashir and his supporters have the right to delight in meeting their new-found hero and friend Gration. Why not, for the Envoy has laboured hard to embellish the image of Khartoum and absolve it of its crimes. In this regard, Gration declared that genocide in Darfur has ended, that sanctions against Khartoum are baseless and that the IDPs should prepare for return to their villages by the end of this year. Mesmerised by his friendly reception in Khartoum, Gration proceeds to commission supposedly likeminded governments that are on the good side of GoS. Thus he points out that he has travelled to Cairo and Beijing to meet leaders who share common concerns with the USA and work together towards shared objectives. Needless to say, China has consistently armed Al-bashir and defended him at every opportunity. As for Cairo, the Darfur war is “artificial” and a figment of western imagination. These are Gration’s partners for peace in Darfur, but the worst is yet to come. Evoking a logic of placing sheep under the care of a hyena, and in an incredible insensitivity to International NGOs and the people they feed, alike, Gration declares:

“We want the government to take an active role to make it easier for NGOs to bring the humanitarian assistance the people so desperately need. We want the government to take responsibility for the security situation, the security forces, the police forces, for improving the situation.”

And the government obliged in its usual fashion. Within a week or so of the statement, reports informed us that the Janjaweed, government paramilitary and army destroyed 80 villages in an SLM-held area, looted 4,000 livestock and raped around 40 women. So much for Gration’s ‘cookies and honey’ strategy.

While Khartoum continued celebrating Gration, the very stakeholders he was appointed to help were receiving him with outrage and anger. The IDPs, the rebels and people of the south have all deplored his cookies strategy in no uncertain terms. In his recent visit to a camp in Darfur, an IDP conveyed this in a rather eccentric way. He patched one of his eyes for the meeting and faced Gration saying: “I am wearing this [patch] on my eye because I cannot look at you, Scott Gration, with both eyes after what you have said”. The host was referring to the testimony on Darfur given by Gration before the US Senate Committee of Foreign Relations. In what Professor Reeves calls “outright mendacity”, Gration denied his testimony and reduced the encounter to a mere misunderstanding, presumably of an ignorant and a poorly educated IDP.

As for established Darfur Movements, Gration shares Khartoum's vision that they are no more than "criminal gangs and have not unified for peace talks". Having lost touch with the leadership of genuine Darfur Movements that have an active presence on the ground, Gration resorts to the creation of alternative movements capable of showing more cooperation and compliance. With a helping hand from Gaddafi of Libya and Mubarak of Egypt, Gration designs his own DIY movements:

".. we're looking for a leader the Darfuri people want, somebody they can unify behind, who can be an articulate spokesperson for their issues, so that when they get into the negotiation session with the government of Khartoum.."

Gration's urge for the creation of fresh movements metamorphoses into obsession and the gamble pays off. Luckily, there is no shortage of takers with the new movements indulging in fission and fusion and coming and going as fast as the hotel bills are paid. There is now a host of groups, popularly known as "Gration's movements" but a leader with the desired specification is yet to emerge. The problem of Gration's movements lies in the origin of the very groups that he wishes to turn into a unified political organisation. Following his call for unity, they flocked to him from every corner of the globe; some came straight from Khartoum, some popped out of the internet and others got reincarnated after prolonged death and decomposition. Ironically, Gration wanted fewer movements, but he got more. The end result is a state of utter confusion; neither Gration, nor any one of us can now track down the number of Darfur movements around for they multiply by the week and it doesn't help that they have run short of new names.

Gration's desperation to decontaminate the image of the Khartoum government leads him into an unholy association with the McFarlane group. McFarlane himself was convicted for criminal dealings in the notorious Iran-Contra Affair but was later pardoned by former US President George H. W. Bush, 1992. However, through MacFarlane, Envoy Gration also connects himself with Mohamed Babiker, a known Sudanese intelligence personnel in Addis Ababa.

Gration's innuendo about his links with DynCorp International also raises some embarrassing questions and exposes the shallowness of the esteemed Envoy. As if there is no clean company in the USA, DynCorp International also came across US criminal investigation spotlights. The company was accused of overbilling the US government to the tune of \$50 million in its delivery of services to US troops in Kuwait; not a patriotic stance for a firm which is entrusted with serving American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan as well.

Gration's use of DynCorp could have passed without any remark from us, had it not been for another aspect central to the cookies strategy of the Envoy. Through DynCorp, Gration uses a long-standing Sudanese intelligence interlocutor to undertake reservations, air ticketing and payment of per diem to delegates of Gration's movements. I am referring here to Mr. Mutaz Alfahal who played a similar role in the 1990s in the negotiations between the National Democratic Alliance and the SPLM led by the late Dr. Garang. His Sudan intelligence connection was exposed when some irregularities were discovered in the US finance to the talks. What is farcical is not that Gration shoulders Khartoum's bill for spying on his movements. Oh no, the Khartoum government is much smarter than that. In effect,

the US taxpayer is paying Khartoum's bill for spying on the activities of the US Envoy as well. How more callous can the US Envoy be?

Sudan government has certainly been smart; I am prepared to grant them that credit. At the same time, I must state that one should question their wisdom to pay for expensive public relation costs for McFarlane and others, while they have Gration, ready to offer the same services for free.

While we debate the Envoy's dismal performance in Darfur, we should not lose sight of his main portfolio in South Sudan, namely his duty to keep the CPA alive and help speed up its implementation. Here too the 'cookies and honey' strategy flipped. It is true that the gates of Washington remain, as have always been, closed against the Darfurians, of course unless they come through the Khartoum government. But South of Sudan is much more fortunate and has the ability to engage Washington almost at any time and at the highest level. In this regard, Kiir Mayardit, President of South Sudan has communicated to US President Obama that Khartoum deserves no cookies at all. As he put it, "the status quo in the centre has remained the same", Khartoum "continues fermenting violence in the south" and that extra pressure and not its relaxation as Gration suggests is the answer.

Let us end this essay by going back to Gratin's flare for unifying Darfur movements and spare him the accusation of creating them in the first place. My preposition is simple. If Gration has a talent for rallying people around a cause, I suppose there is plenty of work for him in Washington. President Obama needs to overcome the obstinate problem of rallying US citizens or unifying them to use Gration's catch phrase around many issues; chief among them are the commendable universal health coverage, withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, energy consumption and bailing out strategic firms including big banks. Let Gration go and test his wonderful gift in Washington. As for us in Darfur, we understand that the Washington Logic has made it difficult for President Obama to pursue all his election campaign promises regarding Darfur. His strategy for Darfur unveiled a few days ago is commendable although many early promises went missing. We understand new events might have rendered some promises unrealistic. However President Obama can do us one little favour that doesn't cost much. He can simply take our Darfur file off Gration's hands.

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