

ETHNIC TENSION IN SOUTH SUDAN: THE WAY FORWARD

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ABSTRACT

South Sudan the world's newest state is on the cusp of a civil war since 15th December 2013 its capital Juba, has seen rival units of its army the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) fight each other Armed groups have at the time targeted civilians based on ethnicity ,violence has spread beyond the capital ,violence including areas already fraught with ethnic tensions, principally Jonglei State over which the government has lost control .The dynamics of the leadership struggle between President Salva Kiir, a Dinka, and former Vice President Riek Macher a Nuers colours politics throughout the country, illustrating the prevalence of Ethnicity at the highest office .Following Kiir's dismissal of Macher and the entire cabinet did not come as a surprise to the international Community.

This paper observes the role of ethnicity in South Sudan is real and problematic in the country's polity and her people social experiences. It has been adopted by leaders to unite their respective members for defensive and offensive purposes. The Conflict in South Sudan is seen as a challenge and a threat to the democratization process in South Sudan. This paper observe the role ethnicity has played in the conflict .It has resulted in the loss of lives and break down of law and order .The solution lies with a leadership that is transparent and accountable to the people.

KEYWORDS: Ethnicity, Crisis, South Sudan

INTRODUCTION

There have been rumours about a planned coup that surfaced in Juba in late 2012; South Sudanese President Salva Kiir issued a series of decrees making major changes to the senior leadership of his government, party and military. In January 2013 Kiir replaced the Inspector General of the National Police Service with a Lieutenant from the army, and dismissed six deputy chiefs of staff and 29 major generals in the army (Sudan Tribune 2013) In February 2013 Kiir retired an additional 117 army generals (Agence France Press 2013). It was viewed as troublesome in regards to a power grab by others. The scale of these reorganizations was unique. Kiir had also suggested that his rivals were trying to revive the rifts that had provoked infighting in the 1990s (Al Jazeera 2013). In July 2013 Kiir dismissed Vice President Riek Machar, along with his entire cabinet. Kiir suspended the SPLM Secretary-General Pagan Amum Okech, an ethnic Shilluk, and issued a decree preventing him from leaving Juba or speaking to the media (Mcneish 2013).The decrees elicited fears of political unrest, with Machar claiming that Kiir's move was a step towards dictatorship and announcing that he would challenge Kiir in the 2015 presidential election (Al Jazeera 2013). He said that if the country is to be united, it cannot tolerate "one man's rule."(Al Jazeera 2013). Kiir disbanded all of the top-level organs of the SPLM, including the Political Bureau, the National Convention and the National Liberation Council in November 2013. He cited their failed performance and the expiration of their term limits (Sudan Tribune 2013).

The conflict in South Sudan started on 14th December 2013, when a faction of the Sudan People's Liberation Army began an alleged mutiny in South Sudan. President Salva Kiir called it a coup attempt and announced that it had

been put down the next day, but fighting again erupted on 16th December and spread beyond the capital, Juba, to the region around Jonglei which is prone to ethnic instability, again largely along ethnic lines. Conflicts, when they occur, leave in their wake, tales of woe, which the country and its citizens have to contend with. “There are definitely ethnic undertones to what is happening,” said Toby Lanzer, the deputy special representative to the U.N. mission in South Sudan. “But this is a political struggle within the ruling party. It’s actually by addressing that that we are going to be able to get things under control” (Lanzer 2013). A major consequence of conflict is the effect it has on human capital and material resources of a country. Conflicts also have negative implications for economic growth and national development. It stultifies growth much as it scares away foreign investors. Even local entrepreneurs lose the risk of losing their investments thus, reducing the pace of economic activities. Apart from this, the increasing number of internally displaced persons as a result of conflicts aggravates poverty while resources which could have been channelled to other developmental projects are diverted by the government to resettle victims of conflicts. At least 1,000 people were reported to have been killed (Al Jazeera 2013) and over 800 other people were injured (www.nbcnews.com). Kiir blamed former Vice President Riek Machar for instigating the "coup" but Machar denied any knowledge of it and instead blamed Kiir for playing power politics. If politics can be defined in terms of “ who gets what, when and how” then the allocation of values and resources may be said to lie at the very heart of politics .The manner in which values and resources are distributed determines the amount of justice ,fairness and equity, that is attributed to government. Conflicts that develop as a consequence of perceptions of inequality and relative deprivation are casually linked to the manner in which values are distributed in society. The conflict in South Sudan lead to further displacement of people, which place an increased strain on host communities in neighbouring countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda that already have a long history of accepting refugees from the Sudanese civil war. The current flows of displaced populations from conflicts in Somalia, the Central African Republic and Democratic Republic of the Congo however, an additional influx of South Sudanese refugees would have the potential to overburden and destabilize the region further.

This paper is divided into five sections, the first section will look at the conceptionalization, while the second section will look at the background to the conflict, while the third section will look at the participants to the conflict, the final section summaries the paper.

Conceptionalization

Conflict is seen by Otite (2004) as arising from the pursuit of divergent interests, goals and aspirations by individuals and, or groups in defined social and physical environments. However despite the awkwardness of conflict in human life, man has not been able to either adequately explain its causes. Thus Mark and Snyder (in Faleti (2005:36) Opined that

Given the perverseness of conflict phenomena and the diversity of approaches of enquiry, it is legitimate to ask whether the apparent intellectual disorder reflects an inherently incoherent focus of social analysis .A focus artificially created by a label or whether the disparateness of data interpretations is due in part to inter disciplinary compartmentalism, to academic individualism or rapid growth with its consequent in attention to direction.

The complex and changing nature of conflict contributed to seeming anarchy of approaches, while the environmental context may have contributed to this. However some school of thought believes that conflict being purely negative or dysfunctional is incorrect because in some cases something good comes out of conflicts. The Hegelian dialectics of Thesis-Antithesis-synthesis emphasizes that contradiction leads to tension and conflict, while its resolution

brings about social changes that takes society to a higher level of development. It is on this view of dialectics that, Karl Marx was able to build his theory of society. Thus man's concerns with conflicts should not really be on how to eradicate it (in any case this is not possible) but on how to manage it so that it does not become destructive through violence, but constructive through leading to positive changes. Newton Garver (1991:47) opined that violence is best explained relative to its etymology—to violate. According to him, the basic issue about violence is that somebody is being violated. From the above views, the extended definition of violence enables us regard any action that infringes upon the rights of citizens as constituting violence. The extension of violence to the realm of Government crops up out of the opinion that a government is guilty when it has the means but fails to prevent such violations of rights like killing, maiming, injustice and discrimination. This is to say that citizens of any state are valuable and any government policy should take the ideal ends of the citizens into consideration. Erikson (1985:19) felt that violence or violent act may also be collective (perpetrated by a group) or individual (perpetrated by an individual). This categorization does appreciate the importance of the individual, of personality and of subjective factors even in collective behaviours and their dynamics. According to Grimshaw (1990:15) "few scholars of the individual oriented disciplines would argue that personality or attitudes alone can serve as an explanation for violence and few sociologists would argue that personality factors are irrelevant." In other words when social or political space is contested or economic resources are allocated, the potential for conflict exists. Violence is inevitable when accommodative structures break down.

The issue of identity has been a major cause of violent conflicts on the African continent. According to the former Secretary –General of the UN:

"The widespread rise of what is called identity politics, coupled with the fact that fewer than 20 percent of all states are ethnically homogenous means that political demagogues have little difficulty finding targets of opportunity and mobilizing support for chauvinist causes. The upsurge of "ethnic cleansing" in the 1990s provides stark evidence of the appalling human costs that this vicious exploitation of identity politics can generate" (Annan, 1999:6).

Participation refers to voluntary actions and choices open to the individual for making demands on government policies (Stedman, 1993:376). The issue of participation becomes problematic and can lead to conflict when individuals or groups attempt to monopolise all available avenues for meaningful political participation to the exclusion of others mentioned. This is the case of South Sudan.

The issue of distribution refers to the differential spread of, and access to values and resources in society (ibid; 378). If politics can be defined in terms of 'who gets what, when and how' then the allocation of values and resources may be said to lie at the very heart of politics. The manner in which values and resources are distributed determines the amount of justice, fairness, and equity that are attributable to a government in power. Conflicts that develop as a consequence of perceptions of inequality and relative deprivation are casually linked to the manner in which values are distributed in society (Gur, 1974:24). The ongoing spate of violence in Blue Nile Sudan is a result of perceived inequality in the distribution of Sudan's revenues, a large percentage of which is obtained from the state. The issue of legitimacy involves 'the individual's belief in the rightness of the rules governing political competition within a society (Stedman 1993:378). The issue of legitimacy determines the extent to which a government is seen as acceptable or not, either by opposing groups or the population at large. Indeed for conflict to occur, either between groups or against the state, there must be deep-seated perceptions that the configuration of power within the country is unacceptable.

Finally, a phenomenon which dramatises the adversity of conflicts in Africa and the fragility of human security

are the large populations of refugees that have been generated by such strife. The State has responsibilities to the citizens not only in terms of safeguarding their legal or civil rights but in terms of equally catering for their natural or human rights. The State is an outgrowth of the society and its basic purpose is to socialize political structures. Human beings are always inclined to act egoistically, always wanting what is in their own interest, irrespective of the interest of other individuals or groups. The fundamental function of the State therefore is imposing those constraints that are necessary to protect and promote each person's freedom. (Kolawole 1997:79). However the legal system of the state must constrain both the power of the sovereign and the citizens' wicked and evil desires in order to establish the conditions under which people can live together in peace as a community. The above is the point at which the failure of the South Sudanese state gets manifested because no resolute pursuit is given to the preservation and defence of the rights of citizens from infringement by the state.

Background to the Conflict in South Sudan

In December 2013, rising political tensions among key leaders in South Sudan erupted in violence, three years after the country gained independence from Sudan in an internationally supported public referendum. The political dispute that triggered this crisis was not clearly based on ethnic identity, it overlapped with pre-existing ethnic and political grievances that sparked armed clashes and targeted ethnic killings in the capital, Juba and then beyond. The fighting which has occurred between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and forces loyal to former Vice President Riek Machar, and among armed civilians, has caused a security and humanitarian emergency that draws the world's newest country into another civil war. South Sudan Liberation Army was a prominent and important actor in the success of the independence which made it a powerful force in South Sudan. It has also become a pawn between power players in the country which has resulted in civil war and ethnic rivalry. There are two major tribes in South Sudan, the Dinka and the Nuer, where the President Salva Kiir is Dinka and the Vice-President Dr. Riek Machar is from the Nuer tribe.

The crisis within the SPLM centred on political disagreements over the party's leadership and future direction. The elections for 2015 were forthcoming the urgency for decisions to be made increased, as did divides within the movement. Internal SPLM debates occupied much of the country's political leadership. Decisions on a national census, constitution and elections began to revolve around support for an opposition to the president's rule and eventually stalled. SPLM dominance, and the conflation of party with state, meant that whoever commands the former also controlled the latter (Crisis Group Africa Report 2011). The current crisis arose when Dr. Riek Machar, who was the Vice-President of the country and the vice-chairman of Sudan People's Liberation Movement, decided to contest for the position of Chairman of SPLM. This did not go well with the President, Salva Kiir who happened to be the Chairman of the movement as at then. SPLM is a strong party and has its independent authority and democratic rights on its own and anybody controlling it can contest for leadership, Salva Kiir saw as a threat to his leadership. Machar got support from the SPLM Secretary General Pagan Amun and Madame Rebecca Nyandeng de Mabior member of the SPLM Political Bureau. This created a rift among the two leaders and this escalated when Machar, Amun and Nyandeng decided to boycott the National Liberation Council (NLC) meeting on December 15, 2013.

During the meeting, President Salva Kiir ordered SPLM Major General Marial Ciennoung to leave the meeting and disarm the troops at the barracks. After every soldier in the barracks was disarmed, Ciennoung commanded just the Dinka ethnics to arm themselves. This led to a confrontation between him and his deputy who happens to be from the Nuer ethnicity. The soldiers saw this as power-play and a means for the Dinka ethnic group to wipe them off totally like in the case of Rwanda in 1994. The Nuer soldiers decided to re-arm themselves which led to an outbreak of conflict resulting in

shoot-outs among the soldiers. The conflict was extended from the soldiers when the Dinka soldiers started attacking the Nuer civilians in Juba (capital of South Sudan).

President Salva Kiir accused Machar for instigating a coup against him and he announced that the crisis had been curtailed but this was not the case as the situation continued to get worse with widespread of killings of the Nuer civilians by the Dinka soldiers. According to Human Rights Watch article, eye witnesses gave accounts of lots of dead bodies in Juba on December 17, which were removed the next day to undisclosed location (Human Rights Watch 2013). Although Machar and Kiir are both members of the SPLM, they stem from different tribes with a history of conflict. Kiir is an ethnic Dinka, while Machar is an ethnic Nuer. Some observers reject ethno-tribal explanations of the conflict as overly simplified (Samatar 2013). Machar spoke for the first time since the crisis began on the 18th December 2013 in which he said he was not aware of any coup attempt, but instead blamed Kiir for fabricating such allegations of a coup in order to settle political scores and target political opponents. He also said the violence was started by the presidential guard, which was founded by Kiir and told to report directly to him instead of the military. More than 200,000 civilians have been internally displaced by the violence including more than 60,000 who have sought refuge at UN Peacekeeping bases (UNOCHA 2014). 40,000 people have fled to neighboring countries. According to UN estimates, thousands have been killed and UN officials indicated targeted attacks against civilians and UN personnel may constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity (OHCHR 2013). On 24th December 2014, the UN Security Council unanimously authorized a substantial increase in peacekeeping forces for the UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS) through Resolution 2132 (2013). In previous remarks, the U.S Permanent Representative to the United Nations has stressed the urgency of the situation noting the possibility of “imminent confrontations at U.N bases where civilians are gathered” (Samantha 2013).

The Guardian and BBC reported that 240 Nuer men were rounded up and killed at a police station in Juba in mid-December. The United Nations Assistant General Secretary Ian Simonovic has cited and confirmed these survivor stories in an opinion article into the Gudele massacre. Official death toll has not been released as South Sudan government troops have blocked access to Gudele and other affected, now abandoned suburbs of Juba. The Guardian report also reported that 21 Nuer youths as well as three women were killed in two other incidents. This number sets to grow, as Human Rights Watch article cites eye witness accounts of truckloads of bodies carried to undisclosed site on December 18, 2013, shortly after the Gudele massacre of Nuer civilians. Numbers of the dead in Juba now exceed initial estimates. Human Rights Watch has noted the South Sudan government has sealed off access to Nuer suburbs where the genocide began. The affected neighborhoods are heavily guarded with armed security presence, hampering reporting and independent investigation.

On 10th May 2014, the two sides, the Kiir government and the Machar rebel government agreed on peace treaty which was held at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia which was pioneered by Senator John Kerry, the United States Secretary of State who met the two warring parties and encouraged them to sign the treaty so that there would be Peace and a way forward. (BBC News 2014). Progress to date, has been limited, as both sides wage fierce campaigns to gain and hold ground, seeking to maximize their negotiating positions prior to any ceasefire agreement. The position of political figures detained by the government at the onset of the crisis remains a sticking point. Meanwhile, the probable for tensions among displaced communities to spark further violence is a source of concern.

Participants in the Conflict

The Conflict in South Sudan highlighted the activities of the actors involved in the crisis. One would think that the

conflict was about President Kiir and former Vice President Machar. It has gone further to explain the role of other actors' participation and impact on the polity. Despite various reports of civilian-on-civilian violence and the opportunistic mobilization of militias as the conflict has unfolded, world leaders emphasize that this crisis is naturally political and requires a political solution. Many, including President Obama, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, and Pope Francis have called South Sudan's leaders and participants in the conflict to order on their actions threaten which affects the future of the country. The African Union (AU) has expressed "deep dismay and disappointment" at "the failure of political leaders in the country to live up to the hopes and aspirations of their citizens," and has publicly urged President Kiir to release the detainees to facilitate talks between the opposing sides (African Union 2013).

The U.N. Secretary-General warned on December 24 2013, "the world is watching all sides in South Sudan," announcing that the U.N. was bolstering efforts to investigate reports of human rights violations and crimes against humanity and declaring that "those responsible at the senior level will be held personally accountable and face the consequences—even if they claim they had no knowledge of the attacks" (United Nations 2013). He stated, "Now is the time for South Sudan's leaders to show their people and the world that they are, above all, committed to preserving the unity of the nation" (Ibid). The U.N. Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2132 (2013) on 24th December 2013 in response to the crisis. Further deliberations were to be made in January 2014. The resolution, which calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities and the opening of political dialogue, supports an increase in the military component of UNMISS from an authorized 7,000 to 12,500 troops and in the police component from 900 to 1,323 personnel. It additionally authorizes the Secretary- General to facilitate inter-mission cooperation and, "if needed and subject to further Council consideration," complementary force and asset generation, including through the possible transfer of troops and force enablers from other U.N. missions.

U.N. efforts to mobilize these resources are underway, although it remains unclear how quickly new forces can be deployed, and how any potential transfer from other missions might affect competing needs elsewhere on the continent, including for the crisis currently underway in the Central African Republic. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the East Africa regional group that led the peace negotiations between Sudan and South Sudan in the early 2000s, had to mediate talks between key leaders in the crisis with the support of the U.N. and the AU. Special envoys from the United States and the European Union are also playing a role. High-level IGAD engagement has pushed both sides to send negotiation teams to Ethiopia. This resulted in both groups signing an agreement on the 23rd of January 2014 and give access to humanitarian aid. "The ceasefire agreement is only a temporary solution; any of the two sides could break the deal any day soon as they have other issues," Messay Kindaya, a regional political analyst told *Sudan Tribune* "The case in South Sudan is an obvious struggle for power between Kiir and Machar. I doubt the ceasefire agreement would last long," he added, further stressing that achieving durable political solution to the crises in South Sudan would be a huge challenge ahead.

Transformed conflict is to be expected by widespread displacement, atrocity crimes and famine. Despite some progress, nine months of peace talks in Addis Ababa have been unable to stop the fighting. Warring parties in South Sudan are preparing for major offensives as seasonal rains ease. Hardliners in both the government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army-in opposition (SPLA-IO) are entrenching their positions and think as one opposition commander declared "we will settle this with war". The coming violence will present new challenges for UNMISS as it prioritises protection of the nearly 100,000 civilians sheltering in their bases.

CONCLUSIONS

The parties to the conflict have refused to comply with the agreements signed and serve as an obstacle to the peace in the polity. Time is of real meaning to expand the current peace process and future challenges. The government of South Sudan is borrowing heavily against oil futures to fund the war, its troops are often unpaid, and thousands have left. If adequate care is not taken the state could be bankrupt. It remains unclear who is funding and arming the opposition and how this outside support may be undermining mediation efforts.

South Sudanese leaders should learn to be up and doing. They must understand that political instability should be discouraged if they must develop as a nation. Leaders must realize that strong institutions are the key to successful strong parliaments, honest police forces, independent judges, civil societies. These are the things that give life to democracy. This is very vital for their citizenry. With better governance put in place South Sudan holds the promise of a broader base for prosperity. The country is rich in natural resources and from cell phone entrepreneurs to small farmers; she has the capacity to create economic opportunities. This will depend on the political will on the part of her leaders in creating peaceful atmosphere for her population.

We expect that the United Nations Security Council to instruct the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) to use its good offices to prevent further cessation of violence against civilians. They should establish an international contact group and arms embargo. It will outline roles between UNMISS and humanitarian groups on ground. At the same time, the regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) must better link its stuttering peace process with communal dialogues inside South Sudan and reach out to excluded constituencies.

China and the U.S should play a more active, impartial, and dependable and transparent role in ameliorating the regional divisions to help break the impasse. The two should take a harder line with their allies within the region who continue to enable the war and are party to cessations of hostilities violations.

The United Nations Security council should maintain UNMISS's core protection of civilians mandate, including allowing civilians to shelter within UNMISS bases until they able to make a safe and chosen exist.

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