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Solo Flight

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SOUTH SUDAN: A COUNTRY OF GREAT PROMISE UNREALIZED

The hoped end game in the conflict in the Southern part of Sudan arguably began with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord of 2005. This document created the autonomous region in the mainly Christian part of the country that had seen such strife and conflict. The Sudanese People Liberation Army (SPLA) and the Sudanese Peoples Liberations Militia (SPLM) were the two key guerrilla forces that have fought a long and bloody battle of liberation from the Muslim dominated North. The 2005 agreement was the culmination of the fight in that it provided six years of transitions to what eventually would become the nation of South Sudan. South Sudan however has seen considerable conflict since the creation of an autonomous state in 2011 and is home to one of the largest displaced persons and refugee populations in the world¹. This paper seeks to look at the creation of the county, what caused its formation and what has prevented a level of success in building a functional and thriving nation state. While there has been promise and a desire on many peoples part to have this newest of countries be a success there have been significant obstacles that have prevented its success and unless they are conquered the opportunity to move the country forward will not be realized.

Sudan historically had been one of the largest countries in Africa comprising 2.5 million square kilometers at the start of the 21st Century. It has seen influence with migration from the Middle East resulting in a significant Muslim population in the North. Like much of Africa it saw its share of outside influences looking to stake territory or take advantages of resources and trade. During the 19th century Sudan was loosely administered by Egypt with an increasing British influence on the whole regions. France had an early role to play but it was the death of the

¹ [Aleksi Ylönen](#) Reflections on Peacebuilding Interventionism: State- and Nationbuilding dilemmas in Southern Sudan (2005 to the present) 21 Mar 2016. P. 216

Governor-General of the Sudan, General Charles Gordon, at the hands of Mahdist forces in 1885 that led to the evacuation of Khartoum and the beginning of the 14-year period of Mahdist rule². Kitchener led a force to take back the area in 1898 with Egypt drawing Sudan further into its sphere of influence with initiatives to link it more closely with its own economy.

Following the retaking of Sudan the British in 1898 who would have significant colonial influence as it put together a string of colonies south along the Nile and beyond. The northern part of Sudan continued to be predominantly Muslim with Arabic influences. Due to its proximity to Egypt and accessibility to travel it saw more colonial influence and development. The southern part of the country contained vast arid plains to the west and in the southeast had the Sudd, a large swamp bordering the White Nile the size of Texas. The south was largely Christian and had little Muslim influence. The British recognized these significant differences in the culture and way of life of these two parts of Sudan and separated them for administrative purposes in 1924. After World War Two and the beginning of decolonization the British began to remove themselves from Sudan and Egypt leaving independent countries at least on the map. By 1956 Sudan achieved independence, around the same time as movements started in the south for greater representation in the north and a bigger share of what Khartoum had to give out. The north had the greater population and was imposing sharia law, Arabic as a common language and Islamic traditions that were not shared by the south. The increasing tensions led to increasingly better organized and potent rebel forces that eventually resulted in the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Movement (SPLM) dedicated to having autonomy for the peoples of the south. This ongoing civil war lasted for the rest of the 20th Century and eventually led to the involvement of African neighbours, the US and the UN.

² Durham University. The Sudan at War. Sudan Wood Bequest Project
https://www.dur.ac.uk/library/asc/projects/woodsudan/exhibition/sudan_war/

From the outside a possible separate state in southern Sudan had potential: the area of the Sudd is relatively fertile even having the ability to grow 2 crops a year in some places.³ Additionally oil was discovered in the area of the border with the southern states. But while there was the potential for success the reality was continuing bloodshed and poverty. The amount of land under cultivation continued to diminish as violence increased and the security of the crops could not be maintained. The oil that was discovered could only be exploited when there was security and freedom from bandits and criminality.

After 50 years of strife the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed between the Government of Sudan and the SPLM/(Army) giving the southern provinces increased autonomy with the eventual promise of a referendum that would determine the final fate of the region. No one was surprised when 98% of the people in the three southern provinces voted for full independence. On July 8 2011 South Sudan celebrated its independence day. It's been almost a decade now since the agreement was signed but the progress of the country has been less than stellar. The country continues to host one of the largest UN missions dedicated to population assistance and development on the earth - only the disaster in Syria has resulted in greater migration and strife. Uganda, South Sudan's neighbour to the south, has the largest refugee camp in the world - largely containing South Sudanese. The agricultural sector produces a fraction of its former yield and grows nowhere close to enough food to meet its own consumption despite being a net exporter of food in the decades during even the civil war. There were substantial efforts made after the CPA to move the new country toward self-sufficiency and security. Intervention priorities were identified with security being the first among them. The

³ Xinshen Diao, Liangzhi You, Vida Alpuerto and Renato Folledo . Assessing Agricultural Potential in South Sudan – A Spatial Analysis Method

international community poured a substantial amount of money into the new country estimated to be around \$1Billion per year. ⁴

The aid and assistance did not stop once the country was created and there continued to be substantial investment from the international community in making South Sudan a success. By December 2013 the country had slipped back into civil war with the violence along the ethnic and tribal lines that had caused tensions in the region before. IGAD (International Authority on Development) brought the fighting parties together in 2015 to sign a further agreement but why after all this work and the final resolution of the creation of a new country did it fall apart so quickly?

First, from the time of the CPA in 2005 to the actual creation of the country six years later there was substantial time to put in place the framework for success for the new country. The players needed to recognize issues that were likely to cause tension and friction as the new levers of power were created and distributed to the levels of government. The Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan (TCSS) was developed chiefly by the SPLM as they were the main belligerents fighting for independence. The CPA had allowed for a decentralized government structure to take into account the significant ethnic differences that existed in the region – over 60 different tribes. The main tribes were more inclined to central authority where they could have an influence over all the country and tribes. It wasn't benevolence but desire for power and the control it allows that they were after. There would need to be further refinements to the constitution and power sharing but that would not come until more rounds of fighting.

⁴ Luka Biong D. Kuol, South Sudan: The Elusive Quest for a Resilient Social Contract . Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding, 16 Jul 19 P. 66

The sponsors of the CPA needed to recognize that much of the civil strife during the civil wars fought in Southern Sudan revolved around the attempted domination of the southern peoples by the northern Sudanese. The population and the power were concentrated in the north and the desire of those in the north to build a Sudanese culture that mirrored their views did not sit well. Now the same thing was happening in the new country with central control and a desire to put together a country that mirrored what the largest tribe wanted it to look like. The SPLM had the predominant ethnic groups as their main actors – the Dinka and Nuer tribes. But no tribe in South Sudan makes up a majority or even close to one. The two tribes together would be a slim majority but there is a sizable number of other groups that are included in the 60 plus tribes that inhabit the country. In the same way the north dominated the political process for decades the path after independence had the two populous groups overshadow the political process and gain power. The perception in particular was that the Dinka was the key player something that had been believed for more than 40 years after the very first peace agreement to end the Sudanese civil war.

For the country to be a success everyone must feel they are South Sudanese. Even the CPA had given considerable control to the Dinka and Nuer tribes as they had been the main forces in the SPLM. As a consequence, the nation tried to form their own defence forces the leadership and command structure was dominated by these two groups. The result was a feeling of further isolation and marginalization in the other equatorial tribes. But the CPA had tried to address the ethnic diversity of the new country by coming up with levels of government for the country, states and local levels. This was ultimately a lot of government to put into place in relatively short order and the underlying theme reverted back to ethnic and tribal supremacy. The violence

that erupted little more than 2 years after the country was created resulted from the decreasing quality of life and governance that many of the people experienced. There was little progress made in having the new country move forward with institutions and infrastructure.

Democracy needs to have broad support to be effective. The 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCCS) attempted to address some of the failings of the constitution that led to the first civil war in 2013. This agreement was to formalize power sharing and governance for the future of the country. ARCCS signed in August 2015 designated that the two main parties would share power in the country⁵. The unfortunate result was another round of fighting as both groups had moved substantial forces to Juba in the Spring of 2016. More violence and steps backwards and while the Opposition leader was forced to flee the country the governing party was accused of starting to mount a genocide and cement their hold on power. The soaring rhetoric only kept the parties apart and the country less functional.

National institutions need to work for all. The UN and the host of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) and Governmental Organizations (GO's) were attempting to feed and keep alive hundreds of thousands marginalized by the fighting. After more than 5 years of this the UN put together a legion of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps typically housing people outside of the local power brokers. With food, water, medicine and education provided by the NGO's a cycle of dependency had developed where those people in the camps see little reason to leave. These camps typically have minority tribe members from the area in them as they will not have support or safety outside. Not only may they not be safe outside the camp because of

⁵ Lotje de Vries, South Sudan's Civil War Will Not End with a Peace Deal. *Peace Review A Journal of Social Justice* Volume 29, 2017 P 334.

criminality or ethnic violence but the camp provides them with a better quality of life than the meagre subsistence many could scrape together outside the camps. Protection of civilians is the UN's number one mandate and this protection along with NGO teaching of their children in school and providing for medical care isn't a part of the problem but it makes the solution more difficult. The impact was that more people for the first time started to identify with their tribe as much as the country. There had been a significant number identify with the country first after independence but that shifted after the fighting.

National resources should be for national benefit. Oil has been a key part of the fight both for the creation of a separate South Sudan and will be a part of its future though there are some complications. Oil in abundance was discovered in the Greater Upper Nile states in the 1970's⁶ which brought the area to the attention of American and European multinationals. It also brought new money to the conflict and ensured that the arming of all sides would continue with this source of revenue. With much of the oil in the south the north and Khartoum was eager to keep the wealth. Part of Jonglei state that had much of the reserves was named Unity state and troops dispatched during the battle for independence to ensure the oil flowed to the north's benefit. For the future this area represents a substantial area of wealth that will need to be harnessed for the people of South Sudan. Complicating the issue will be the fact the only oil pipeline that leads out of the area flows to the north. No formal agreement was put in place to pay Khartoum a royalty but after independence they demanded payment of \$30 per barrel for the oil to flow over their land⁷. The price was never paid and oil production ground to a halt for many months.

Revenue from oil has represented 99% of national government revenue in South Sudan.⁸ Oil

⁶ Peter Martell, *First Raise a Flag: How South Sudan Won the Longest War But Lost the Peace*. Oxford University Press, 2018. P. 101

⁷ IGAD, *South Sudan Oil Almanac, An Open Oil Reference Guide*. 2014

⁸ Sudarsan Raghavan, *With Oil at Stake, South Sudan Matters to its Customers*. The Washington Post. 20 Jan 2014.

will be an undeniable part of the national fiscal and solving the oil transit and sharing issues will be a key part of the development of South Sudan.

Beyond oil another area of economic activity that has so far perplexed government parties is the ongoing conflict between farmers and ranchers. Like the conflict between sod busters and cattlemen of the West in late 19th Century America the cattlemen of Jonglei and other regions have had a centuries long claim to land they use to raise their cattle. With arable land near the rivers farmers use the land to sow crops in the ground that could potentially support significant agricultural varieties.⁹ As the cattlemen, who are often well armed as they move about, have needed to move to a region with water and finding farmers crops the result is often met with violence sometimes with considerable casualties. This problem has continued to plague the greener equatorial region in the south of the country as ranchers have moved south away from the fighting further exacerbating the job of governance. Security in the countryside will be a good start to solving this ongoing concern.

Use the ties that bind for nation building. While there are many spirits and tribal beliefs in throughout the region the country is predominantly Christian in its beliefs¹⁰. Sunday mornings will find many people in a variety of churches and there are both Catholic and protestant believers in the mix. Many of the social service providers have a basis in the works of the church – whether it be an orphanage supported by evangelical Christian group in Egypt or a grammar school that receives money and expertise from a church in the UK there is considerable work across the country being done by the church and it is generally a respected institution. The

⁹ Xinshen Diao, Liangzhi You, Vida Alpuerto and Renato Folledo . Assessing Agricultural Potential in South Sudan – A Spatial Analysis Method

¹⁰ Peter Martell, First Raise a Flag: How South Sudan Won the Longest War But Lost the Peace. Oxford University Press, 2018. P. 12

English language as a holdover from British colonial days is a common trait among people both in the cities and to a lesser degree in the countryside but it gives them an advantage in international business and working with NGO's.

Help the UN help the country. The UN and their Special Representative for the Secretary General (SRSG) have continued to work with the Government of South Sudan (GoSS) to try and get them to realize that nation building is going to take a genuine and sustained effort to commit to the unification of peoples in the country. The UN force there has both a Chapter 6 and 7 mandate though the latter is rarely used. The UN does not have a very functional relationship with the GoSS and the government seems at times to barely tolerate its work and shows open suspicion of UN motives. During the 2016 fighting Reik Machar the Nuer leader fled the country fearing for his life as the two main ethnic groups battled it out. The UN brokered his return to the country and his government position to further promote an inclusive government representative and impartial. The GoSS needs to recognize that a strong and big tent country will prosper all South Sudanese.

South Sudan is a country full of challenges but also one of promise. It has a generous and friendly people, the potential of significant arable land, the assistance of many agencies intent on assisting the development of a functional state and common cultural and religious ties. The country as so far not realized much of its potential despite all these efforts and seems bound by sectarian and ethnic violence until it can muster leaders and a willingness to put self-interest behind them and the broad interest of the development of the country ahead. For the wellbeing of all South Sudanese let's hope that time soon comes.

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