

# After the War, Before the Peace: How to Move on in South Sudan

Felix Breiteneicher, University of Economics Prague



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## Abstract:

As the principles of the ‘responsibility to protect’, self-defence and the abiding of national sovereignty have failed in the past UN peacekeeping mission in South Sudan, a future approach accompanying the current ceasefire must be both critical and realist. It needs to take into account the identity realities around missing South Sudanese nationality through reconciliation and re-integration as well as the structural issues on the ground, such as former militias, local tribal rivalries or the oil and agriculture production. The topic of regime change has to be put back onto the agenda, especially in the wake of the North Sudanese revolution. Furthermore, the international community must involve the country’s neighbours and better control arms’ trade but also further build-up its own health infrastructure and post-conflict education.

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The conflict in South Sudan is continuing to burn, even though currently on a low flame. President Salva Kiir (of the Dinka tribe) and Vice President Riek Machar (of the Nuer tribe) have agreed on another national unity government earlier this year, after a deal was reached in Khartoum back in 2018. The two political leaders have been rivalling over revenues of the country’s oil production and the administrative consequences for years. While Kiir is supporting a more centralized state system and a direct national control over the resources, Machar supports a more de-centralized approach with more political power for the regional states. Formed during the civil war struggle against the north, the internal conflict of the last years has further split the *South Sudanese Sudan People's Liberation Army* into its official government (Dinka) wing and a rebel (Nuer) *Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition*.

## Intervention & Sovereignty in a de-facto Dissolved State

With violence having continuously sparked up over the years, both the South Sudanese government as well as the peacekeeping forces of the United Nations have lost the support of the local population and failed to protect unarmed citizens from tribal-targeted persecutions. Government politicians had been involved in corruption schemes even before the country’s independence in 2011 and their ill-led forces have used the defenceless population as human protective shields.

“As civilians were put in harm’s way and violence escalated in close proximity to the peacekeepers and their bases, UNMISS did little to protect civilians. There are numerous reports that peacekeepers fled their posts entirely, going so far as to leave the gated entrance to one of the POC sites wide open. Peacekeepers also refused to engage even when humanitarians and U.N. personnel they are directly mandated to protect were being physically and sexually assaulted within the confines of the city.”<sup>1</sup>

Liberal scholars point out that there can only exist a voluntary subjection of nation states to outside control and that a state’s sovereignty must always be abided. At the same time, the ‘unity government’ in Juba is paralysed in disunity and UN peacekeeping forces cannot defend the civil population because the tribal divisions are affecting the country’s whole society. If the South Sudanese government is not speaking for their own nation and international troops are neither following their ‘responsibility to protect’ nor mere self-defence, the logics of an outside intervention by the international community are not working out as planned.

### **Multiple Issues & A Multi-Level Approach**

A future multilateral and multicultural strategy regarding humanitarian intervention in South Sudan must therefore consider both realist principles of regional security and African power balance as well as critical approaches regarding cultural burdens and identity politics in the country.

The chaos following South Sudanese independence was largely caused by international diplomacy not touching upon the topic of regime change (both in the North and the South), as it had been considered before e.g. by the U.S. Clinton administration. As structures remained unchanged, former political conflicts were also dragged into the newly created state.

While the local population had stood together both against the British colonialist rule and later against the political suppression from the Muslim North, tribal conflicts could erupt because of the lacking common national identity of the world’s youngest state. It would lie in post-colonial responsibility to develop a sense of South Sudanese nationality through both post-conflict reconciliation and inclusion.<sup>2</sup> The ‘responsibility to protect’ needs to also account for the South Sudanese army and rebel forces. This means integrating former militias into the national state

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<sup>1</sup> Baker, Cheri: Brutal Violence in South Sudan: How Peacekeepers Can Do More to Protect Civilians. War on the Rocks, November 27, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> See: Unger, Barbara; Wils, Oliver: Sudan: Conflict Analysis and Options for Systemic Conflict Transformation. Berlin 2007.

and prosecuting previous crimes independent of former government amnesty.<sup>3</sup> The military activism can be combined with education and societal engagement, e.g. the fight against hunger.<sup>4</sup>

The most recent outbreaks of violence were based on small local tribal rivalries, overseen, and possibly controlled, by village elders.<sup>5</sup> Defend the vulnerable ceasefire agreement and tackling ethnic conflict at its very structural roots would be central tasks for a common South Sudanese unity government and a determined international community.

Reconciliation also includes working together with the new leadership in Northern Sudan to avoid future negative interference from Khartoum in its former province. This concerns especially agreements about the oil infrastructure as the current lacking oil production in the South is also affecting businesses outside the oil-rich provinces.<sup>6</sup> The oil economy must therefore be finally seen as a project of national development, not tribal enrichment.

Lastly, the agricultural sector must be developed into a multi-ethnic regime as well and national corridors have to be established to allow much needed food supplies and humanitarian aid to reach the affected regions.

### **Thinking outside Ethnic Lines and the Border Box**

South Sudan is considered to be “Africa’s arms dump”<sup>7</sup>. Besides Western industrialized countries, also many other African states have been involved such as the D.R. Congo or Libya. In 2018, the United Nations Security Council finally agreed on an arms embargo for the country. Nevertheless, trade of small arms has continued through cross-border tribal structures (another postcolonial heritage) and military capacities have been repaired or replaced.<sup>8</sup>

Controlling the arms imports into the country must be the very basic principle to resolving the South Sudanese conflict. Furthermore, secure mechanisms against ‘conflict export’ have to be established (e.g. by the African Union), as conflicts are not out of existence only because they ended - as the examples of the former Yugoslavia or Rwanda have shown in the past.

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<sup>3</sup> See: Warner, Lesley: Lasting Solutions Elusive for South Sudan’s Militia Problem. In: World Politics Review, March 12, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> See: Takpiny, Benjamin: South Sudan to field military in fight against hunger. Anadolu Agency, 15.05.2020.

<sup>5</sup> See: Lasuba, Memo: More Than 200 Killed in South Sudan Inter-Communal Violence. VOA News, 19.05.2020.

<sup>6</sup> See: Foltyn, Simona: Independent South Sudan’s economic woes. Al-Jazeera, 09.07.2015.

<sup>7</sup> Doki, Charlton; Ahmad, Adam: ‘Africa’s Arms Dump’: Following the Trail of Bullets in the Sudans. Guardian, October 2, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> See: [n.a.]: South Sudan: Evidence of violations and illicit concealment of arms must spur UN to renew arms embargo. Amnesty International, 30.04.2020.

Furthermore, South Sudan's neighbouring countries need to finally find a common position about which political actors and military forces are supposed to be ruling in Juba. Until now, the IGAD countries - Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda – all had conflicting interests in the country which blocked a successful international regime approach.<sup>9</sup>

As the example of the recently started peace negotiations with the Taliban in Afghanistan have shown, international actors can even convince terrorists to sit down at the discussion table. It will be a decisive future task for the members of the United Nations Security Council to not only monitor the current peace agreement in South Sudan but also to develop a sense practical political and military responsibility for the country themselves. The UNSC could especially profit from the valuable experiences of China being involved in peacekeeping in South Sudan.<sup>10</sup> Further development of UN infrastructure will be essential in building a post-conflict regime as military commanders need to be better trained and international capacities regarding health but also the public image of the peacekeepers on the ground must be enhanced.<sup>11</sup>

This future multi-level policy approach could then provide real change in order for the country's unity to come back and for South Sudanese nationality to finally develop.

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<sup>9</sup> See: Williams, Jennifer: The Conflict in South Sudan, Explained. Vox, January 9, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> See: Zhang, Chun: From conflict resolution to conflict prevention: China in South Sudan. In: Shanghai Institute for International Affairs.

<sup>11</sup> See: Baker, *ibid.*

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