



THE SUDD INSTITUTE

RESEARCH FOR A PEACEFUL, JUST AND PROSPEROUS SOUTH SUDAN

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Why Celebrating Tragedy should End

What the Incessant Violent Confrontations Mean for the Ordinary South Sudanese

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Nearly a decade of fledgling tranquility following the signing of the Sudanese Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and the attainment of statehood, South Sudan unfortunately relapsed into armed conflict that has since claimed tens of thousands of lives and displaced millions. The South Sudanese peace project has attracted a compendium of reactions, including policy analyses, enlistment of international peacekeeping forces under the UN, and multi-stakeholder local advocacy. These local, regional, and global efforts to usher in peace have not been satisfactorily efficacious. Quite disappointingly, a number of acceptable strides, such as the secession of hostilities pact reached in Addis Ababa over a year ago, have been retarded by violations committed by both warring parties. Violence has raged on, even during active attempts to settle the conflict, though on a varying scale. Consequently, many major towns predominantly in the Upper Nile region have numerously changed hands between the opposing parties.

Recently, a new bout of large-scale armed confrontations hit the states of Upper Nile and Unity, with new allies of the SPLA-In Opposition taking control of Malakal and its surrounding vicinities, equally threatening the nation's only oil producing facilities in Paloch. Such short-lived victories, like many in the preceding periods, excited jubilation in the armed opposition. Among certain quarters in the opposition, these military victories supposedly marked the last breath of the Kiir's administration. As expected, the government mounted its own military operations and soon reclaimed Malakal and Melut. Its ranks and sympathizers, the same way as the opposition, subsequently rejoiced, posing triumphant as if the rebellion is exhaustively terminated.

What these partisan celebrations fail to take into account, however, is the increasing tragedy that afflicts the South Sudanese. The latest violent confrontations, like their predecessors, have troubling implications for civilians' physical security and livelihoods. The United Nations¹ reported that as many as 150,000 more have been internally

¹ http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50887#.VWn5Y2BX_dk

² South Sudan's rural population according to the 2008 census constitutes 83 percent.

displaced by this recent violence.

This review contends that incessant military confrontations between the government and the opposition are taxing for the country. Thus, any excitements over captured towns constitute celebrating tragedy and subsidize South Sudan's fragility. Any thought of military victory by any of the contending parties is near utopian. Therefore, South Sudanese are more likely to secure sustainable peace via a negotiated settlement. As opposed to letting violence rage on perpetually, South Sudanese should actively demand more investments in negotiation enterprises to secure peace.

Although the violence erupted in Juba in December 2013, it quickly spread to the three states of Upper Nile region, resulting in dire humanitarian consequences for the civil population there. Large-scale destruction of property, deaths, and displacements ensued. Malakal town, for instance, has nearly been razed to the ground. Education and health facilities have either been decimated or turned into military quarters. Basic services and economic activities remain suspended. Additional violence further exacerbates this situation, as has been recently witnessed.

This incessant violence, the taking and retaking of towns, has only temporarily emboldened the warring parties, giving the illusion that military victory is possible, and in turn making parties less interested in prioritizing a negotiated settlement. It means more destruction of South Sudan's limited resources, human lives, and livelihoods. It deprives South Sudan's future generations of economic opportunities to compete with their peers in other nations. It means subjecting state capital investments to ruins, the burden of which will be borne by future generations. What is more worrying is that violence causes more death among noncombatants, due to both direct and indirect military actions. Often, it is the vulnerable members of the population—the elderly, women, and children—who bear the brunt of armed violence. The incessant military race to control towns constitutes pushing the opposition fighters into the rural areas where the livestock of the local population² becomes threatened, inflicting even more economic consequences into the rural settings. Even when peace is attained, this segment of the population will continue to suffer long-term ill health and economic disparities because of the residual effects of violence.

Moreover, states normally confront insurgencies by increasing military spending. Since the inception of the new wave of violence, the Juba's administration has spent astronomically on the military, with hundreds of millions of dollars allocated for combat hardware, enlistment, and maintenance of foreign forces. Hundreds of millions have also been spent on crisis management efforts and political outreach. Due to declines in oil prices and violence-induced suspension of oil production in some areas, the government supports these expenditures through loans. This diverts investments in essential services for the population, depresses economic growth, and burdens the future generations with debts.

In it all, there is no single hubris over captured towns by other South Sudanese that can

² South Sudan's rural population according to the 2008 census constitutes 83 percent.

compensate for these losses. To this, celebration of tragedy must stop. Instead, an immediate termination of the crisis should be a primary demand of the South Sudanese. Attaining just peace decreases carnage, allows for improvements in livelihoods, restores justice and accountability, and reduces excessive military spending. Above all, this secures South Sudan's future among peaceful polities.

About Sudd Institute

The Sudd Institute is an independent research organization that conducts and facilitates policy relevant research and training to inform public policy and practice, to create opportunities for discussion and debate, and to improve analytical capacity in South Sudan. The Sudd Institute's intention is to significantly improve the quality, impact, and accountability of local, national, and international policy- and decision-making in South Sudan in order to promote a more peaceful, just and prosperous society.

Author's Biography

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