



THE SUDD INSTITUTE

RESEARCH FOR A PEACEFUL, JUST AND PROSPEROUS SOUTH SUDAN

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Weekly Review

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Borders, Bombs and Sudan-South Sudan Unworkable Agreements

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Over the past week, the people of South Sudan have been reminded once again of the horrific wartime experiences when Sudan's air force randomly and indiscriminately dropped bombs from a high altitude Russian-made Antonov onto villages and civilian facilities. On Tuesday, November 20th, 2012, the terrifying Antonovs returned with their well-known terror. They started and have continued to drop bombs over Northern Bahr el-Ghazal State, specifically in Gok Machar, Kiir Adem and Kiirkou Payams (districts) of Aweil North County. The Sudd Institute has received credible reports that 7 people had been killed in these air raids by last weekend, with a total of 900 families displaced from their homes. Pictures of destruction and death that we received from the area are shocking.

This week's review tries to highlight the questions that are being asked about why this raiding is suddenly happening at the time when the world expects the implementation of the agreement recently signed in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia by the presidents of South Sudan and Sudan, which included a deal on border security. The questions being asked throughout South Sudan today are the obvious ones, but whose answers elude us all. They elude us not because they are difficult to find, but because little is understood about why Khartoum would engage in such behavior at this hour of efforts to give meaning to the creation of peace and harmony between the two countries. Creating two viable Sudans to live in peace and harmony with one another had been the foundation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the referendum and independence of South Sudan. That these air bombardments should happen in the midst of efforts to honor that pact, particularly now, after the September 27th Addis Ababa agreement, is quite puzzling. But in what has now become a familiar pattern, Sudan's army denied that Khartoum is involved in the bombing of South Sudan. All Khartoum could say, as it has often done in similar situations, was that it has engaged Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army – North (SPLA-N), a Sudanese opposition army, which fought as part of South Sudan's opposition forces during the north-south civil war in the former united Sudan, and which Khartoum accuses Juba of continuing to sponsor.

This leaves the question of whether this bombing is truly linked to a kind of a hunt for the rebels in the border area. Before the bombing started Khartoum had begun to link the implementation of the Addis Ababa accord, especially the resumption of oil production since January when South Sudan shut it down in protest against Khartoum's demand for processing, transit, and export fees that Juba deemed unacceptable. As South Sudan was preparing to resume oil production as per the agreement, Sudan's government started to

make new demands, the most important of which was linking the resumption to the issue of SPLA-N, telling Juba to sever its connection to this opposition group or the oil will not pass through its territory and facilities. Khartoum went further to demand that Juba government should disarm the SPLA-N fighting the government in Khartoum before it allows the southern neighbor to restart oil exports. Was this new demand an excuse to backtrack away from the compromises Khartoum thinks it may have made under duress but now decided it does not want to honor? Does Khartoum have real convictions that Juba should assist in disarming the SPLA-N or is it simply asking for the impossible so that it can continue to blame Juba for its own domestic political challenges.

Or is the bombing then more related to the border aspects of the recent Addis Ababa agreements? The agreement included a deal on border security, contested areas and establishment of a 10-mile demilitarized buffer zone along the largely unmarked 1800-KM border. The area of the current bombing was an important subject of the border negotiations, a territory inhabited by the Malwal section of Dinka, north of the Kiir River. A piece of this territory, referred to as “Mile 14” of the proposed buffer zone, was agreed to be included in the Addis Ababa deal. Its inclusion in the demilitarized zones rubbed the Dinka population of the area very badly and was the subject of demonstrations and protests in Juba and in other towns, suggesting that many South Sudanese feared that the placement of this territory under this designation honors Khartoum’s claim for the area. Was Khartoum then responding to these protests as a way to test how far South Sudanese are willing to go in defense of areas they deem their own? Was it a provocation aimed at drawing South Sudan into a confrontation that might force Juba to make further compromises on oil and other economic matters?

Whatever the right question and answer, this current attack on unarmed civilians and on their property is something so many South Sudanese had hoped would cease with the end of north-south war – and especially after independence. When Khartoum authorities signed the CPA, or when they agreed to the conduct of South Sudan’s referendum or when they became the first to recognize the independence of South Sudan, many people in this new country remained skeptical about Khartoum’s genuine commitment to peace and coexistence. But with this, more people have all together lost every little confidence they had in Khartoum’s words about peace. This is a serious development, with implications for overall security on the borders. It is important for South Sudanese and their government to exercise restraint in response to this provocation. Swallowing one’s pride in the face of such aggression, in order to prevent escalation, can be considered a form of bravery.

The biggest question of all is how the world community will react to this bombing. This is not the first time Khartoum has done this while talking the language of peace. It was not long ago when they invaded Abyei and emptied it of its population in flagrant contravention of the CPA, right under the nose of the United Nations peace-keeping mission and little was done to hold Khartoum accountable. We also have vivid recollections of similar bombing in Unity State in April of this year, something that was never condemned by the international community, at least not to the same extent as the condemnation of South Sudan in the aftermath of the retaliatory occupation of Panthou/Heglig. If the African Union Peace and Security Council sits back and watch the citizens of South Sudan being killed while the AU is mediating between the two countries, how will South Sudan trust AU neutrality in this mediation? What will the United Nations Security Council say about this bombing during its

session on Wednesday? If history is anything to go by, nothing will be done and Khartoum will yet again be emboldened by the silence and will more likely continue to conduct its campaign of destruction. The only party that is most concerned about this violation of international law and about the killing of innocent citizens in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal state is South Sudan itself. What will the authorities in Aweil and Juba do?

How military authorities on the ground in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal, the people of South Sudan in general and the government in Juba react to this aggression, can make or break any hopes for peace between the two countries. The dilemma that confronts South Sudan is a real one. To respond to Khartoum's provocation in like manner could unravel the hard won peace and independence, except that of course South Sudan does not possess warplanes to retaliate in the same fashion and can only respond using ground troops the way it did in Panthou in April. But to suppress the anger, attend to the victims in calm and watch what Khartoum will further do could show up the government in Juba as having failed to protect its citizens against foreign aggression. The latter attitude, however, is more valuable in the long run, as South Sudanese appear more interested in stability and good neighborly behavior.

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.

About the Author

Jok Madut Jok is the Executive Director and a co-founder of the Sudd Institute. He is the author of three books and numerous articles covering gender, sexuality and reproductive health, humanitarian aid, ethnography of political violence, gender-based violence, war and slavery, and the politics of identity in Sudan.