



NORTH-SOUTH SUDAN CONFLICT HISTORY AND CHALLENGES FOR THE NEW STATE

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On Sunday 11 January 2011, the people of South Sudan voted in a pivotal referendum on self determination to secede with North Sudan in fulfillment of the requirements of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). As of July South Sudan will be the newest country in Africa having to face major challenges due to many years of civil war and marginalisation by the North. The current social, political and conflict dynamics in South Sudan are complex owing to historical and cultural factors that continue to impact governance, coexistence and development.

Historical overview of North-South conflict

Since independence from the British in 1956 Sudan has suffered ongoing civil conflict. In 1985 the South rebelled against the imposition of Sharia law, sparking a civil war that lasted until 2005. The root cause historically, has been the culture of domination by the North, which historians say begun in 1760 with enslavement of majority Afro-Sudanese. This was later extended on the economic level when fertile and rich South became a major cash crop producer. Southerners, historically, resented what they considered exclusive management and exploitation of the economy by the North.

When the British colonised Sudan in the 1880s, they proclaimed an end to slavery but failed to advance the interests of the Southerners. As decolonisation began, the British entered a joint rule of the Sudan through the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium Rule between 1952 till independence in 1956. Southern leaders opposed to this decolonisation strategy at the Juba Conference in 1947, sowing the first seeds of calls for the right to self-determination. Historians argue that British policies entrenched the cultural, racial, religious and regional differences between North and South Sudan without doing anything to secure the future of the vulnerable South in the event of independence. The Condominium Rule was considered a ploy to hand over power at Independence to the North and Egypt. This prolonged domination begun policies of the government in Khartoum, which marginalised parts of the country and concentrated power, the economy and military in a Northern clique.

The armed conflict between North-South begun with the Torit mutiny of 1955, when Southern battalions rebelled as independence approached. The rebellion (Any Nya I) was officially launched in 1956 as a struggle against the centre between independence up to 1972, with the signing of the Addis Ababa Agreement (AAA). AAA gave the South some autonomy with its parliament.

Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement (SPLM) was formed in 1983 at the start of the second war (Any Nya II) when Southern battalions rebelled against policies of former Sudanese despot Jaa'far Numeiri, who abrogated the AAA and declared Islamic law across the country. It has been argued that the discovery of oil in the South caused Numeiri to want to topple the AAA. Still, the AAA, unlike the CPA, was consigned to doom from the start as critically absent in the agreement was the provision for security arrangements for the South to protect itself from the North in case of aggression or abrogation.

The Anya Nya I movement clearly called for the right to self-determination of the South. However, the SPLM and its military wing the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) called for the birth of a new Sudan based on justice for all Sudanese all joined along side the SPLM/A in the fight to liberate and put in place the new Sudan on a new political dispensation and basis of equality.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA)

In 2002, the United States government's Sudan Peace Act declared that Bashir's regime was conducting a campaign of genocide, claiming upwards of 2 million lives, against the Southern provinces. The international community led by the U.S. soon stepped in and pressured both sides into a series of long peace talks. In 2003/04, substantial progress was made and the fighting began to die down. The talks finally brokered into peace on January 9, 2005 under the terms of the CPA, a watershed agreement ending over 21 years of civil war. The CPA contains provisions addressing five broad areas presented below, which have significant implication for positive relations between North and South, and harmonious coexistence in the South.

i. Permanent military ceasefire with formation of the Joint Integrated Units (JIUs), a combination of the North's Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and SPLA.

ii. Power sharing: New government structures were to be formed, including the semi-autonomous Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) and various reforms designed to achieve democratic transformation and reframe the constitution around international standards of human rights.

Although both the Interim National Constitution was signed and GoSS formed in 2005, still the official demarcation of the 1956 border between North-South has not been concluded.

iii. Wealth sharing: Revenue from oilfields was to be split equally between North and South. This provision has had a positive outcome, bringing Southern Sudan a sizable annual budget although the transferred amount of revenue is contested by GoSS.

iv. Resolution of the Abyei conflict: Abyei region has been a flash point for violent clashes between North-South as the boundaries of the oil-rich area have been a point of contention. The Sudan National Congress Party (NCP) refused to adopt the recommendations of the Abyei Boundaries Commission and the matter was referred to the international arbitration in the Hague where a decision was reached in July 2009 in favor of Southern Sudan.

v. Resolution of the conflict in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States: Communities that had joined SPLA during the civil war in the fight against the North, and whom under the CPA have the right to determine their future in the North-South arrangements.

The CPA also set out a 6 year interim period during which new government institutions were to be established and a population census and national election to take place. At the end of this period, Southerners would have the opportunity to vote for unity or independence. Furthermore, Islamic law was to remain in the North and voted on for the South.

In general, the CPA has resulted in significant changes towards self-governance of Southern Sudan. However, it has also given rise to misgivings about the NCP's commitment to the CPA, and has resulted in both sides continuing to focus on military preparedness, including buildup along the North-South border.

Challenges for the new state

Following the creation of permanent ceasefire between North-South in 2005, the Southerners having their minds diverted from this conflict applied their energy for confrontation over South-South disputes. As a result divisions in South Sudan and internal conflict among armed civilians have increased over the last four years. Though many of these conflicts had subsided in the period leading to the referendum, still insecurity will remain a major threat to internal harmony in South Sudan. The following issues related to these conflicts need to be tackled otherwise they will continue to impact negatively on efforts to build peace and security in coming years. Main issues for the new country include:

- The challenge of uniting a strikingly multi-ethnic citizenry into a nation state, while at the same time accommodating the pressure to create ethnic based administrative units with attendant historical boundary claims, which trigger conflict.
- The problem of demobilising various militias that have challenged the authority of the armed forces since the CPA was signed. The CPA did not include other Southern rebel groups engaged in North-South civil war. These 'neglected' militias have potential to cause trouble for GoSS unless serious rapprochement is achieved.
- The Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Programme has not moved as fast or effectively as planned.
- Weak administrative structures and poor infrastructure contributes to inability of security organs to respond to conflict in time before it escalates into violence.
- Abyei region will continue to pose threat to the security of South Sudan until a durable resolution is found.
- The elections of April 2010 demonstrated that Southern political dynamics and power struggles carry great potential for conflict. The notion of people that elections are not always fair and the power is captured by specific groups increases the risk of potential escalation of violence.
- Finally, poverty, high levels of illiteracy, aid dependency and lack of infrastructure are major challenges the government of the newly independent state will have to overcome so as promote peaceful coexistence among its people and thereby sustainable peace.

References:

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