



Policy Paper

No3

7 February 2011

Africans Decide

Hopes and Fears for the long-awaited independent South Sudan

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Sudan, the largest country in Africa and in the Arab world, once represented the hope of peaceful coexistence between Arab and African, Muslim and Christian. We are currently witnessing the predominantly Christian and animist African South voting for its secession from the North. This article will try to examine the reasons why Sudan is going to be divided, the fears and uncertainties for the newest sovereign state in the African Continent and how is this secession is perceived firstly in Africa and secondly in the world.

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From 1924 until independence in 1956, Sudan was essentially divided into two separate territories. The British did not allow the two areas to integrate and people from the South were not allowed to travel to the north and vice versa.

Sudan's north is a semi desert area on the outskirts of the Saharan desert inhabited by Arabic speaking Muslims, while its south is composed of rainforest and is inhabited by Nilotic¹ African people with Christian and animist beliefs. In Antiquity, the area was known as 'the Kush' and had strong cultural ties with Egypt.

Christianity predated Islam in northern Sudan². A missionary sent by Byzantine empress Theodora arrived in north Sudan in 540 AD. Arab military attempts to capture the area all failed, forcing them to conclude a series of treaties with the local population. Islam penetrated the region over a long period of time through intermarriage and contacts with Arab merchants and settlers. Islamic and Arabic culture gained hold in the north and overshadowed the indigenous and Christian cultures. By the early 19th century, the Ottoman ruler of Egypt, Muhammad Ali, had conquered northern Sudan and at the end of the 19th century the rulers of Egypt and the Mahdist government in Khartoum invaded the south in order to gain access to more slaves, gold, ivory and taxation revenue. Arabs were interested in the material value of blacks as slaves and so had no wish to integrate with them since, if the southern Sudanese had converted to Islam, it would not be possible to use them as slaves in an Islamic context³.

British, French and Belgians had all claimed the waters of the Nile by the 1890s. Britain feared that the other imperial powers would take advantage of Sudan's volatility and gain territory that was previously a part of Egypt. Britain waged military campaigns to capture Sudan from 1896 to 1898. An agreement was reached in 1899 establishing Anglo-Egyptian rule, under which Sudan was governed by an Egypt-appointed General, with British consent.

In reality however, Sudan was administered as a British colony, and the British pursued a policy of divide-and-rule in order to stop all efforts of unification between Egypt and Sudan. Inside Sudan, this policy could be seen as a British effort to exacerbate and manipulate differences between Sudan's numerous ethnic groups. From 1924 until independence in 1956, Sudan was essentially divided into two separate territories, a predominantly Muslim Arabic speaking north and a predominantly Animist – Christian south where Christian Missionary activity and the use of English was encouraged. The British did not allow the two areas to integrate and people from the South were not allowed to travel to the north and vice versa.

By the late 1940s, the British gave in to northern pressure to integrate the two areas, albeit without consulting with the southerners. Arabic was made the language of administra-

tion and so, southern elites who were trained in English were kept outside their own government. After decolonization, most power was given to the north and the southerners realized that the central government would not transform the state into a federal one, as was promised to the British.

Due to numerous tributaries of the Nile River and heavier precipitation in southern Sudan, the south has greater access to water; it is much more fertile and has greater mineral resources. North Sudan wanted to exploit the richer south and all these factors gave rise to the southern rebellion which started one month before independence.

The southern separatist movement had always been divided by internal ethnic divisions, since more than 200 ethnic groups live in southern Sudan, whereas the two largest groups – the Dinka and the Nuer - have a long history of animosity and warfare between themselves. The first Sudanese civil war took place from 1955-1972, in which southern rebels fought for autonomy or outright secession from the North. The war cost the lives of half a million people⁴. The Addis Ababa Agreement in 1972 ended the conflict and granted a single administrative region with various defined powers. The peace was short lived, however. In 1983, as part of his Islamization campaign, President Nimeiry declared that Sudan should be transformed into a Muslim Arab state, governed with Sharia Law. In effect of this move, most constitutional rights were suspended. In a turn for the worse, the month June of the year 1989 saw military officers under the general Omar Hassan Al Bashir replace the government⁵.

Nevertheless, Arab imperialism was not the only problem encountered by the southern Sudanese. There has also been the uneven delivery of basic services to the people, the lack of investment in the South and the uneven distribution of the income generated by 'southern' oil. The 'islamization fear' and the fact that provisions made by the Addis Ababa Agreement were not respected led to the second Sudanese Civil War (1983- 2005) between north and south which was one of the most brutal and most destructive wars in the 21st century. Sudan's People's Liberation Army and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLA/SPLM) were founded in 1983 as a southern rebel group which, according to its leader Dr. John Carang, fought for a 'democratic, united Sudan' although most of its members opted for outright secession.

The tactics used by the north in the war led southern people to support the SPLA more widely over time. The rebel movement started its activities through bases in camps inside Ethiopia, but slowly managed to gain control of southern Sudan. The rebel movement, however, had its own internal

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scars. In the early 1990s it faced problems of division, as its Nuer members were unhappy with the Dinka majoritarian rule in the group, as well as the undemocratic leadership of Garang. As a leader, Garang did not tolerate dissent and anyone who disagreed with him was either imprisoned or killed. Moreover, the SPLA under his leadership was accused of human rights abuses; and as though this was not enough, a parallel brutal internal war between the Dinka and Nuer⁶ also raged the south⁷. Ethnic divisions were easily exploited by the central government in Khartoum which gained tremendously by portraying south Sudan as a tribal area impossible to be governed. Central determinant for the second civil war was the discovery of oil in south Sudan, which increased the stakes of war.

The north has been attacking southerner civilians and it is estimated that as many as 200,000 southern Sudanese children and women have been taken into slavery, mainly to the north⁸. In parallel, the north attacked the south for cattle and, when oil was found in south Sudan in the late 70's, the Sudanese military started evicting people from their houses in order to build the infrastructure needed to exploit the oil-fields. The US government's Sudan Peace Act of 21st October 2002 accused Sudan of committing crimes of genocide for killing more than 2 million civilians in the south since 1983⁹. Most civilians have died due to starvation and diseases related to war and forced displacement. The period between 1995 and 2005 is considered to be a single conflict with an eleven year ceasefire.

The two sides reached an agreement after pressure from African and western countries in 2005 in Naivasha, Kenya. The agreement known as the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was meant to end the second Sudanese civil war, develop democratic governance, share oil revenues and set forth a timetable by which Southern Sudan would have a referendum on its independence. The two sides had agreed that the South would enjoy autonomy for six years (2005-2011) and that in January 2011 the southerners would be able to vote in a referendum on independence. Southerners are already voting for independence and the flag of South Sudan¹⁰ is already weaving. Oil revenues, from 2005 up to 2011, were divided equally between the government in Khartoum and the SPLA in Juba, the South's capital. The framework also includes commitments to allow Sudanese citizens the right to live in either north or south Sudan. Southerners living in the north are estimated to number between 500,000 and two million and are also entitled to vote¹¹. Voting in the referendum for independence will also take place in eight more countries: Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia,

Egypt, Australia, Britain, USA and Canada, where a significant population of southern Sudanese refugees and immigrants live.

In addition to the broader referendum, a small region called Abyei which sits at the oil rich border between the south and the north will vote later on to decide which part it wants to join. Abyei's leaders have failed to reach an accord with the Khartoum government on who is eligible to vote for Abyei's borders. Currently, there are tensions in Abyei and the issue was considered very sensitive to be included in the 2005 Peace Agreement. The territory is dominated by the Dinka tribe who support south Sudan and Arab Messiria nomads who migrate with their cattle through the region's rich pastures and who support the north. According to the protocol introduced by the commission, all residents of Abyei are eligible to vote including the Messiria nomadic herders. The southern government claimed that 'residents' should be considered only those who reside in Abyei for at least 7 months per year. The SPLM has also accused the northern government of settling thousands of Messiria in northern Abyei to influence the vote. The Messiria have threatened to carry acts of violence if they are not allowed to vote. Abyei, however, is not the only unsettled issue between the north and the south; while the south votes in the week between January 9th – 16th of 2011, there are still important issues to be solved between the north and the south, such as the exact demarcation of the border¹², how to share water from the Nile river and oil, as well as how to share responsibility for the US \$30 billion debt of Sudan¹³. Bashir has argued that a renewed conflict sparked by these issues could be even more dangerous than the one before the Peace Agreement. It has been reported that both governments are building up their defense powers in case of renewed warfare. Abyei, located between the north-south border, witnessed in May 2008 clashes between the Sudanese army and the SPLA which caused near-total destruction of the town and resulted in the displacement of some 25,000 civilians¹⁴. Following the clashes, the Sudanese president and his southern counterpart, Salva Kiir, agreed to refer the disputes to the international arbitration (PCA) at The Hague. The redrawn borders give control of the richest oil fields of the Abyei region to the North (Heglig oil field), while giving at least one oil field to the South and reaffirming the town of Abyei as the heartland of the Ngok Dinka population. Most of the Messiria peoples are outside of the redrawn borders, making it far more likely that the region will vote to join the south. Currently, the border has not been demarcated and there is still no agreement on who constitutes a 'resident of

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The oil situation in Sudan is quite complex since most of Sudan's oil reserves are concentrated in the south but can only be exported through the north on the way to Port Sudan on the red sea. Both sides are aware that their economies are reliant on oil and war would prevent access to it, and both sides depend on each other in order to make profit out of oil.

Abyei' in order to be able vote. After the first civil war, Abyei was promised a vote in order to choose whether it will become a part of the north or the south, but the vote never took place and the frequent attacks of the Messiria against the Dinka led to the second Sudanese civil war. Analysts have pointed out the danger due to large numbers of armed, unemployed youth allied to neither Khartoum nor Juba, and who present a serious threat.

Today, both Messiria and Dinka groups are heavily armed, and at the moment, Abyei is the most crucial factor for the future of Sudan. If the two sides do not agree on the Abyei issue, there is a high possibility of a return to war. The government's resistance to an agreement is largely based on an attempt to hold on to the oil reserves and pipelines in the area.

Sudan produces around 500,000 barrels of oil a day, and more than 80% of this oil derives from the South¹⁵. With the revenues deriving from oil, the southern Sudanese government is able to fund up to 98% of its budget, whilst oil revenues fund up to half of north Sudan's budget. The oil situation in Sudan is quite complex since most of Sudan's oil reserves are concentrated in the south but can only be exported through the north on the way to Port Sudan on the red sea. Both sides are aware that their economies are reliant on oil and war would prevent access to it, and both sides depend on each other in order to make profit out of oil. In this case, oil can play a crucial element for peace. More importantly for the South is the fact that, since all of its oil is transferred via a pipeline through the northern areas to Port Sudan, the Khartoum government has the power to cut off this conduit and block oil revenues for the southern government.

The Human Rights Watch report titled ' Sudan, Oil and Human Rights' illustrates how the discovery of oil in Sudan in the mid-70's increased violence and how the government of Sudan forced the local population out of their home-areas. Expansion of oil development has caused the violent displacement of the agro-pastoral southern Nuer and Dinka people from their traditional land a top of oilfields. Members of such communities continue to be killed, their homes and crops burned and their grains and cattle looted. The report concludes that the large scale exploitation of oil by foreign companies operating in the theater of war has increased human rights abuses and has exacerbated the long running conflict in Sudan. The government is directly responsible for this forced displacement which it has undertaken in order to provide security to the operations of its partners, the international and mostly foreign state-owned companies¹⁶.

In order to achieve this peoples' dislocation, the Bashir government embarked upon a more sophisticated displacement campaign through the use of the divide-and-conquer tactic. It bought off rebel factions and exacerbated south-south ethnic difference with arm supplies. Most Nuer factions with political grievances against the Dinka-officered SPLA were aligned with the central government and thus a brutal south vs. south war was waged near the oilfields. The southern civil war between the Dinka and the Nuer cleared the way for western and Asian oil corporations to develop the basic infrastructure for oil extraction, through which oil revenues enable the government to increase its military hardware¹⁷.

If South Sudan secedes from Khartoum it could send a clear message to other separatist groups in the continent. Central to the African problems has been the ethnic divisions and prejudices inside their countries. The exclusion by design of minority groups from positions of power remains one of the biggest political problems in Africa. The only way these groups can attain power is through coups or secession. Continental secessionist movements range from the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta in Nigeria, to Right Wing Afrikaner parties in South Africa. Inside Sudan alone, there are already voices of secession in east Sudan where the Eastern Front - a coalition of rebel groups - demands a more just distribution of resources even in Darfur which is situated in western Sudan. The fighting in Darfur follows similar patterns as the conflict ravaged the south for more than 30 years. The fighting in Darfur began with a 2003 rebellion by numerous groups that accused the government of mistreatment and has killed up to 300,000 people, while displacing more than 2,5 million people from their homes, according to the UN¹⁸.

Right now, the whole world is watching what is going on in Sudan. The US and China are the two countries with more tangible interests in Sudan. The US government has declared that Sudan can be removed from the list of 'states that support terrorism' if the referendum of January 2011 goes as planned and it is not disrupted by the government of Sudan¹⁹. The measures taken against countries in the list are restriction of trade and investment, economic sanctions and, in the case of Sudan, blocking assets of Sudanese government officials. If the US removes Sudan from the 'terror list', Sudan will then be able to start business on the growing energy sector. The US will most probably start partnerships with the new country of South Sudan, since it will expect something back for its role in ending the war and pressuring the Khartoum government to respect the referendum. Secondly, with an estimated 24,000 of its citizens living there

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and billions of dollars worth of investments in the country, China is the key foreign player in Khartoum²⁰. Sudan was the fourth largest supplier of crude oil for much of 2009. The state-owned China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) is the largest foreign player with, roughly, a 40% stake in Sudan oil²¹.

China, until recently, relied on its vast northeastern Daqing oilfield to fuel its energy needs, but output is declining. The Sudan project became the first overseas large undertaking to be operated by China. The collaboration is described by the IMF as a joint venture between Sudan and the CNPC with mostly Chinese financing. The role of China in Sudan has been criticized, mostly by the West, since China is willing to do business with a government that is wanted by the International Criminal Court and continues to produce suffering for its citizens in Darfur. China's methods in Africa in general have been criticized since the Chinese are not willing to create jobs for the local population but prefer bringing their more efficient Chinese workers. China admitted that it brought in a team of 10,000 Chinese laborers and there were rumors that the Chinese planned to bring in prisoners to build the pipelines²². The Chinese are allegedly involved in negotiations over a new 1,400 km pipeline, which would link South Sudan to the Kenyan port of Lamu, where it also intends to develop infrastructure²³. Once completed, the pipeline could serve as an alternative route for the landlocked south; this is a central development for the south because it will not need to depend on the north for exporting its oil. The secession of the south from the north would see about 80 per cent of oil revenue shift from Khartoum to Juba and some suspect that Chinese investments will shift along with the revenue.

The crucial question the government of South Sudan needs to ask itself is if South Sudan is going to be a viable state. South Sudan's population is comprised of 9 million people and accounts for almost a fifth of Sudan's total 44 million. Years of neglect and war have left South Sudan the least developed place on earth: 70% of its people have no access to any form of healthcare; one in five women die in childbirth, 9 out of 10 women are illiterate and one in five children fail to make it to their fifth birthday²⁴. Famine is recurrent problem for the local population and 44% of the children surveyed were critically undernourished²⁵. Maternal mortality is the highest in the world, at 2,053 per 100,000 live births²⁶. In 2004 there were only three surgeons serving South Sudan with three proper hospitals and, in some areas, there was just one doctor for every 500,000 people²⁷. Infrastructure, electricity and communications have been destroyed. There

are very few accessible roads in South Sudan, where the danger of landmines exists. Southern Sudan is home to over 1,200 kilometers belonging to the Nile River but there isn't a single bridge spanning the river other than the one in Juba²⁸. Indiscriminate government aerial bombardment has produced numerous internally displaced people (IDP's) and refugees. Moreover, malaria is prevalent in South Sudan. Many wells have been deliberately destroyed by all sides and, during the war, only a small percentage of the southern population in SPLA-controlled areas had access to clean water. In rebel-controlled areas there have been very few functioning schools and thus a whole generation is 'lost' due to illiteracy. Half of the region's population has to live on less than a dollar a day²⁹.

The SPLA does not have the manpower or the weapons to patrol and protect South Sudan³⁰. SPLA has been unable to defeat the Lord's Resistance Army³¹ (LRA), a furious rebel group originally from Uganda, now spreading terror in four countries. In southern Sudan, disputes arising out of the April 2010 controversial elections have set off clashes between the Southern Army and opponents of the ruling party. The national elections in April 2010 were deeply flawed and reports demonstrate widespread intimidation, arbitrary arrests and physical violence even against election monitors. The elections were supposed to help expand democracy in Sudan, but proved to do the opposite. In Jonglei state, southern soldiers were still pursuing a renegade commander who took up arms after he lost the governorship. In the Upper Nile state, thousands of soldiers spent weeks this past summer, carrying out violent campaigns against militia groups opposed to the southern governing party. Killings, beating and rapes by the SPLA were reported and the group has a long history -according to civilians- of confiscating food from civilians, as well as having tribal differences with residents of some areas³². This brings into light the crucial question, whether the SPLA/M can be transformed from a rebel group into a democratic and peaceful political party which will be able to deliver to all its citizens, despite differences in ethnicity or political affiliation. The elections of April 2010 and the consequent local rebellion illustrates that the SPLA/M operates as an undemocratic rebel group, composed primarily by one tribe (the Dinka), even though the second largest tribe (the Nuer) are being represented and a Nuer holds the second position in the Movement.

Neither poverty nor Khartoum is the biggest fear for the new country; its tribal divisions is the largest concern. Now that the common enemy, the Arabs, is going to be removed from the picture, many analysts are afraid that the south is going

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to be caught in internal violence, which - instead of cooling down as independence approaches - seems to be increasing. Analysts suggest that as many as 2,500 people died in 2009 in fighting between cattle-herders and pastoralists of different ethnic groups in the south³³. The Norwegian Refugee Council estimates that 390,000 people fled their homes in 2009 compared with 187,000 in 2008³⁴.

The ferocity of inter-southern attacks on civilians has been heightened since 1991, with tribal revenge taking place between the Dinka and the Nuer. Tribal armies have burned villages and there has been widespread looting of cattle. The further south such raids occur, the harder it is for Juba to blame a trouble-making government in Khartoum for tensions between the groups in the south³⁵. A disarmament programme, designed to limit the violence by cutting the number of weapons in circulation, may be having the opposite effect, as disarmed tribes (such as the Mundari) become soft targets for their fully armed neighbors³⁶. With the threat of Arab domination removed by secession, the risk increases that the South will be cultivated along tribal lines.

The concern of the local people is this: before, they used to attack and raid cattle, but after 2009, they attack the populace. Severe interethnic fighting linked to competition over resources is exacerbated by the widespread availability of weapons. The attacks have featured an increased targeting of women and children. In the summer of 2010, the SPLA destroyed one of the oldest living kingdoms in Africa, Shilluk, and many villages in that area of southern Sudan were completely burned. The army raped hundreds of women, children, men and elders. More than 10,000 people were displaced in the midst of the rainy season, were sent into the forest, often naked, without shelter or food, and many children died from hunger and cold³⁷.

The reason for this brutality was the SPLA's attempt to disarm the tribe and stop a local Shilluk rebellion. For the past year, southern Sudan has been witnessing four largely tribal-based rebellions, coordinated by a renegade SPLA general named George Athor who is unhappy with corruption in the allocation of power and wealth in the region³⁸. Unfortunately, what happened in the Shilluk kingdom is not an isolated incident but comprises of a habitual behavior that occurs whenever the SPLA is faced with armed uprisings. They torture people to make them give information about weapons or rebels. The SPLA is currently also using the tactic of raping men and elders, which is shocking to the eyes of the southern Sudanese³⁹. It seems that the SPLA is taking revenge against tribes who, during the war, supported the north. Even today, when the SPLA is criticized for its action against the

local population, it continues to blame the north. It portrays anyone who rebels against it as being a sellout and a betrayer to the South's cause.

In conclusion, there are not too many communities in the world that have suffered – in duration and in extent - as much as the southern Sudanese have. In the hands of a brutal extremist government they have seen their rights denied, their houses burned, their people raped and dying from hunger for more than 50 years. South Sudan should be independent; it is an entirely different nation from the north. The northern Sudanese consider themselves Arabs and associate themselves with the Middle East, whereas the southerners are Nilotic Sub Saharan Africans. The more worrying question is whether the south is ready for independence. It is the poorest area on earth, filled with tribal animosity and old hatreds. It cannot be denied that the Khartoum government is to blame for many wrongdoings in the South; but from July 2011 -when the new nation will declare its independence- onwards, the whole responsibility is going to be in the hands of the southern Sudanese government.

I conclude with the words of Dennis Blair, a former U.S. director of National Intelligence:

"A number of countries in Africa and Asia are at significant risk for a new outbreak of mass killing. Among these countries, a new mass killing or genocide is most likely to occur in southern Sudan."⁴⁰

South Sudan should be independent; it is an entirely different nation from the north.

NOTES

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