

Post-independence South Sudan: an era of hope and challenges

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The people of South Sudan are living through monumental times as their dreams were realized as their struggles of independence bore fruit on July 9, 2011, and they won a sovereign country. The Republic of South Sudan thus became the 54th state of Africa and 193rd member of the United Nations. Its independence will be remembered as one of the significant events in the history of Africa.

Independence has given the South Sudanese new hope and has provided them with a chance to rebuild their war-torn country. South Sudan has been blessed with a wealth of resources including oil reserves and some of the richest and agriculturally most fertile lands in Africa. It has about 10-20 million cattle and also wildlife herds which can help establish eco-tourism in future. However, the question is whether the newly independent people will be able to build a viable and stable state for themselves.

The hope brought by independence is thus also accompanied by numerous serious challenges. There are number of unresolved issues left for South Sudan and Sudan to deal with and the high hopes and expectations both from the people of South Sudan and the international community will test the abilities of the leadership. There is every reason for the South Sudanese people to hold high expectations since independence was the culmination of their struggles of over fifty years.

Historical Glimpse of South Sudan Exploitation

In the seventh century A.D., Arab Miners in search of gold and emeralds went to the eastern part of northern Sudan and brought Islam to the region. At the time, Sudan consisted of kingdoms and tribal communities with no modern form of government. Centuries later, in 1820-1821, the Ottomans conquered northern Sudan and united the country. But the Sudd, the vast swamp in southern Sudan, stopped them from expanding into the southern part of the region. In 1874, Egypt invaded Sudan again but failed to establish control over the southern areas. Similarly, the Mahdist administration of 1883-1898 also failed to succeed in enforcing itself on South Sudan.¹

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When the Suez Canal opened in 1869, Britain and other European colonial powers (Belgian and French forces) in 1892 captured areas of South Sudan that included Western Equatoria, Bahr el Ghazal, Western Upper Nile up to Fashoda, and by 1896 they established compact administration in these areas. Again in 1897, the French tried to seize South Sudan but failed in their attempt as they developed conflicts with Britain over the region, which became famously known as the 'Fashoda conflict.' In 1898, Sudan was again captured by joint British and Egyptian forces that resulted in the signing of a 'Condominium Agreement' between the two to administer the Sudan. In 1899, Britain and France signed an agreement in Europe which led to the French pulling out of South Sudan, which was handed over to its old authorities who were in control of North Sudan. In 1910, the Belgians (in an agreement concluded in 1896 in which it was said that the 'Enclave' should be handed over to Britain after the death of King Leopold) too withdrew forces from the 'Lado Enclave' (area situated on the West Bank of Upper Nile) after the King died. Thus, after the departure of the French and Belgians, the South Sudan area came under the control of Britain, which was already administering North Sudan.²

During this time, British missionaries traveled to South Sudan from the area which is now Kenya, and tried to convert people there to Christianity. In 1924, due to geographical, cultural, historical and political differences between North and South Sudan, they decided to split Sudan into separate territories: an Arabic-speaking Muslim North, and the chiefly Animist and Christian South. In 1946 they reversed this policy and once again united the northern and southern regions into a single country, with the government located in the north. Arabic was made the official language of Sudan, while previously English had been recommended in the south. Moreover, the south was not given its due share of participation in the new government.³

Sudan eventually won independence from Britain in 1956. The government remained in North. However, soon after independence, North and South relations deteriorated further as the latter felt its rights and due share in all aspects of political, cultural and economic life was being compromised by the more powerful North. This dissatisfaction with north resulted in a civil war that lasted for 17 years. In 1972, the 'Addis Ababa Agreement' was reached between North and South Sudan that gave the southerners the right of self-rule. Nonetheless, this agreement helped in achieving peace only for ten years. In 1983, the North Sudan government called for the enforcement of Islamic law of Sharia that again began to fume differences between the two regions and led to a second civil war.⁴ The reasons also included economic factors, especially since the discovery of oil in South Sudan in 1979.

Finally, on January 9, 2005, with the efforts of the international community, a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed between the NCP government of North Sudan and SPLM of South Sudan. The agreement stated that the South would live autonomously for an interim period of six years (2005-2011). It also included agreements for the interim period on security, wealth sharing, power sharing, and on the status of the three regions of Abyei, Southern Kordofan, and the Blue Nile. The CPA called for a referendum on July 9, 2011 in which the people of South Sudan could decide whether they want a united Sudan or independence.⁵ When the time came, 98.8 % people of South Sudan voted for independence and thus on July 9, 2011, a new country appeared on the map of the world with its capital in Juba. Mr. Salva Kiir Mayardit became its first president.

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We see historical continuity in the exploitation of South Sudan both at the hands of North and the colonials who occupied or invaded the area. The international community only started taking interest in the North-South conflict after the discovery of oil in the area. Otherwise, it remained neglected. Economic interests of the international community forced them to bring an end to the civil war and help find a political solution to the dispute.

Independence

The grievances, lack of cultural identity and discriminatory attitude of the international occupiers in the past and the successive governments of the North motivated the people of South Sudan to start raising their voices for their rights and encouraged them to start an armed struggle for an independent country. However, after the initial euphoria, the new country faces hard times. Peace is fragile and violent conflicts continue at both external and internal levels. In addition, South Sudan faces critical challenges in the near-term as unresolved issues with the erstwhile North can lead to sustained conflicts if they are not dealt with soon.

Post-Independence Challenges

Oil

Oil is a major issue that will have great impact on the future relations of Sudan and South Sudan. South Sudan possesses roughly 75 percent of oil reserves and the Sudan or North Sudan has the refineries and pipelines that could

help both countries benefit fairly from the oil. For South Sudan, the importance of oil rises as it is a new country and its government badly needs money. However, its government is giving a tough time to its neighbor on this ‘multi-billion dollar oil issue.’ South Sudan has closed down the daily production of 350,000 barrels of low sulphur crude, which is normally sent through a 1,600 km pipeline from the oil fields in South Sudan to export terminals in Port Sudan, refiners in China and the global market. Also, the Juba government has refused to pay oil transit fees demanded by Sudan. Sudan is asking for \$36 a barrel for multiple fees, including transit, transportation, processing and marine terminal usage, whereas South Sudan has offered to pay a transit fee of between \$0.63 and \$0.69 for each of the two pipelines, in addition to third-party fees of between \$5.50 and \$7.40 per barrel. South Sudan has also rejected the African Union proposal regarding ‘oil fees’. The African Union had proposed that South Sudan give Sudan a direct cash transfer of \$5.4 billion, plus transit fees of \$1.1 billion, to provide for the export of oil through 2014 and to compensate Khartoum for the loss of the South.⁶

Besides this, South Sudan is accusing Khartoum of pilfering almost six million barrels of oil worth over \$600 million. The South Sudan government has planned to construct alternative pipelines at Lamu, Kenya, and through Ethiopia to Djibouti. In this regard, on March 2, 2012, the South Sudan and Kenyan governments broke ground on a 2000 km pipeline to Lamu worth \$24.7 billion, which they believe will transform the border region between the two countries and Ethiopia. The purpose of constructing alternative pipelines is to decrease South Sudan’s dependence on Khartoum for oil exports.⁷ While this is a positive step, it is a long term investment that will take time. Also, according to international experts, the economic feasibility of these new pipelines will largely depend on the potential discovery of considerable reserves.

For a country that relies heavily on its oil revenues, and whose infrastructure and quality of life are poor, closing down oil production means taking a suicidal path. Moreover, Sudan also cannot afford aggression for long as its own economy is also on a downward trend after the South seceded. Both South Sudan and Sudan are not in a position to afford an economic war. Therefore, wisdom needs to prevail from both sides and there should be an understanding that by cooperating with each other, they can achieve economic viability. An early deal on oil is the need of the hour.

Ethnic divisions

South Sudan is an ethnically diverse country with nearly 200 ethnic tribes. The Dinkas (11%)⁸ are in majority, followed by the Nuer (5%), Azande (3%),

Bari (3%) and Shilluk/Anwak (3%). Inter-ethnic rivalry is a major challenge for the Juba government. Recently, it was reported that tens of thousands of South Sudanese fled their homes after armed men from ‘Lou Nuer’ tribe attacked a ‘Murle’ village, burned homes and killed many people in a Junglei state.⁹ Indeed, this is an issue to be taken seriously by the government. However, it is clear that creating a ‘South Sudanese identity’ in an ethnically heterogeneous society is an uphill task.

Another vital factor that could create difficulties for the Juba government is the ‘politics of ethnic domination’ or ‘ethnic discrimination’ in South Sudan. If one see the current structure of the state, it is interesting to note that President Salva Kiir’s government is dominated by Dinkas. The President himself is from the same tribe and 42 percent of his cabinet ministers are from the Dinka Rek clan. He awarded his state, Warrap, ten ministerial posts. The Greater Equatoria region has higher population than Greater Bhar-el-Ghazal, but the latter was given twenty ministerial posts out of which ten were awarded to the Warrap state alone. On March 9, 2012, President Kiir while appointing ambassadors again gifted the Dinka tribe 53 percent of seats while all the other tribes combined were given 47 percent seats.¹⁰ Hence, such politics is detrimental to political growth and is likely to create grievances against the President. Already, other ethnic groups especially the Nuer are accusing the government of discriminatory attitude towards other ethnic groups.

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Border problems

Five main border areas need immediate attention of the South and North Sudan governments. The first and most volatile region is Abyei. However, according to the SPLM Secretary General Pagan-Amum, four other areas are also disputed. These are (1) the northern-most border county in Upper Nile from the north’s White Nile State, (2) the borderline running north-south between the South’s Unity State and the North’s Southern Kordofan (which will determine who controls the Heglig oilfield), (3) where the Bahr-al-Arab river forms the border between the South’s Bahr-el-Ghazal and Darfur in the North, and (4) the area that forms the western-most dividing line between the Bahr-el-Ghazal and Southern Darfur.¹¹

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Sudan forces attacked a disputed oil town of Heglig in South Kordofan which is under Sudanese rule. The South Sudan forces occupied the area for nearly ten days and withdrew only after international pressure. The aggression was responded to by the Sudan with full force and the neighbors were close to an all-out war. Sudanese parliament declared South Sudan an enemy state, and called the SPLM government 'an enemy.'¹²

Both South Sudan and Sudan need to exercise patience as neither side can afford war in the present circumstances. Diplomatic and peaceful means should be adopted. Sudan should refrain from giving rash and immature statements such as branding its neighbor an 'enemy' and similarly, South Sudan also needs to stop being the aggressor as this will only bring isolation for the newly-born state.

Abyei issue

Abyei is ethnically, politically and geographically caught between Sudan and South Sudan. It is located between Northern Bahr al Ghazal, Warrap and Unity states of the South and Southern Kordofan of the North.¹³ It is mainly dominated by two large tribes – the Ngok Dinka, which is mainly African Christian and pro-South Sudan, and the Misseriya, which is largely Arab Muslim and pro-Sudan. Both the Dinkas and Misseriya compete over the issue of rights to the territory and the right to grazing and water resources. The Abyei area is also rich in oil resources and there are the fears that if this issue remains unresolved for long it could provoke both the neighbors to another war. Although the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement called for a referendum in Abyei along with the South Sudan referendum for independence, both sides failed to put it into practice as they could not agree who was eligible to vote.

Flimsy infrastructure

South Sudan faces a tremendous challenge of development due to its lack of infrastructure – for instance, the country has almost no transport network. As per World Bank estimates, South Sudan's entire road network amounts to 12,600 km out of which only 4000 km is safe or drivable. Building roads is costly because material and equipment have to be imported. Not only this, South Sudan is also way behind in other sectors – it has no irrigation systems, which is important for agriculture expansion, and there is no public water supply system either.¹⁴

Post-independence optimism for South Sudan

While it is true that independence has brought multiple difficult challenges for South Sudan, it has also brought new hope for the people. The country has

some key strengths, which if exploited well, will lead to a viable and stable state. South Sudan enjoys good relations with some of major global powers, Israel, as well as with its African neighbors. Moreover, it is rich in natural resources.

Relations with the United States

South Sudan enjoys cordial relations with the United States. In fact it was due to the support of the US that it was able to achieve independence. For over two decades, the US continued to provide humanitarian assistance to South Sudan and in finding a diplomatic solution to the North-South Sudan conflict. It succeeded somewhat in its efforts as a result of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005 that called for a referendum in July 2011, in which the South opted for independence. After South Sudan gained independence, the Obama administration promised that it will try to provide all possible support to the new state.

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Relations with China

In the wake of independence, South Sudan's ties with China have also evolved positively. Although China's historical support for Khartoum could prove disturbing for Juba, the positive trend should continue. Juba has taken the right path by saying that if the Chinese are to come and partner in developing the new nation, they will be welcomed. China has also reciprocated by noting that it is keen to expand its presence in South Sudan's oil sector along with other areas such as building infrastructure. In January 2012 China offered an economic package to South Sudan including development grants and a possible billion-dollar infrastructure loan.

Relations with Israel

South Sudan enjoys a very special relationship with the Israel. The nature of bilateral ties is so unique that South Sudan decided to open its embassy in Jerusalem instead of Tel Aviv. In December 2011, President Salva Kiir visited Israel and stated that, 'I am very moved to come to Israel and to walk on the soil of the promised land. Israel has always supported the South Sudanese people. Without you, we would not have risen. You struggled alongside us in order to allow the establishment of South Sudan and we are interested in learning from your experience. As a nation that rose from dust, and as the few who fought the many, you have established a flourishing country that offers a future and

economic prosperity to its children, I have come to see your success.¹⁵ Israel-South Sudan relations gained momentum when Israel provided moral support as well as physical support in the shape of arms and international maneuvering during the first South Sudanese struggle of 1955-1972. More significant was the raising of Israeli flags by South Sudanese during their celebrations of independence on July 9, 2011.¹⁶

South Sudan can gain multiple advantages from its ties and can benefit from Israel's economic development. Israel is a member of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and has advanced military technology as well as an excellent educational system that can be very helpful to a new state like South Sudan whose education system is weak. It can thus provide help to the South Sudanese in multiple sectors and forms.

Relations with African neighbors

South Sudan enjoys good relations with its African neighbors that include Kenya, Uganda, Burundi, Tanzania, Rwanda, Eritria and Ethiopia. These East African states helped South Sudan in achieving independence. Eritria and Ethiopia helped the SPLM both politically and militarily during the war and Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda offered safe havens and support to the SPLM.

A stable South Sudan is important to all these countries not only politically but economically too. For example, the country is the main export market for Uganda and Kenya with exports worth \$ 184.6 million and \$ 157.7 million respectively in the year 2009. After independence, its vitality increases even further. A peaceful South Sudan means billions of dollars in trade and investment for East African and other countries in the region,¹⁷ including through the aforementioned pipelines. However, because of its conflicts with the North and its economic fragility, South Sudan needs the commitment and support of its African neighbors as well.

Apart from South Sudan's relations with the US, China, Israel and its African neighbors, it also enjoys strong relations with a number of countries in Europe and Asia.

Resources

South Sudan is a resource rich country with substantial natural resources in plant and animal production. It holds one of the highest reserves in gold and uranium in the world and its mining sector can bring huge investments and in turn creates employment opportunities. More importantly, South Sudan has a

large quantity of oil reserves. These natural gifts suggest that the country has the means to become prosperous.

Prospects for South Sudan

While independence has been hard-earned, future prospects for South Sudan appear grim. While it is true that it has abundant natural resources and the support of the international community, its external and internal vulnerabilities threaten to cause further destabilization. The existing economic conditions, rampant corruption, lack of a common South Sudanese identity

The existing economic conditions, rampant corruption, lack of a common South Sudanese identity and external reliance, among other factors, severely influence the ability of the state.

and external reliance, among other factors, severely influence the ability of the state. South Sudan is facing security issues both at external and internal fronts. At external level, its relations with Sudan are at a very low point and are likely to remain tense in the near future. At the internal level, its heterogeneous tribal society is also a problem. Ethnic or tribal militias continue to kill each other over property, land, livestock, and water and the government has failed to control this menace as its power is very limited outside the main cities and towns. Hence, with multiple sources of insecurity, the outlook for South Sudan is not very encouraging and it is probable that it will remain a fragile state for some time to come.

Way forward

The vision of the South Sudanese leadership will be important in determining the future of the country. If it desires a successful and strong South Sudan, it will have to be very sensible in its decisions and approach.

South Sudan is an ethnic society. Thus, it is important for the government to ensure equal representation for all ethnic groups in the government structure. Ethnic diversity has to be managed tactfully and the government needs to lay down the foundations of the new country on the principle of ethnic equality, where a person of any ethnicity can enjoy all rights. Many countries in Africa are in mess just because of ethnic tensions and this is a future of violence and civil war that South Sudan needs to avoid by using the right policies.

South Sudan enjoys cordial relations with international community. However, it needs to be more sensible in managing ties with Israel and the Arab World.

South Sudan needs to focus on national economic policies to gain self-sufficiency and economic independence. This means looking for trade rather than aid, and focusing on infrastructure development for the sake of long term economic strategic thinking.

Relations with Sudan will be crucial for the future of South Sudan. Indeed, both countries will benefit hugely from cordial ties. Hence, instead of adopting aggression, South Sudan should offer a hand of friendship and approach unresolved disputes through diplomatic means, either bilaterally or through international mediation. The current hostility will only bring about more hatred and enmity.

Finally, South Sudan also needs to tackle its role in the international community with more thoroughness and tact when dealing with matters of its interests. The government failed to present its case in front of international community after the Panthou (Heglig crises) and found itself diplomatically isolated. This needs to be tackled urgently as a trained and able representation from South Sudan will be of much benefit to the country.

Conclusion

Nation building is a bigger challenge than gaining independence. History, especially in Africa, illustrates that nations that gained independence but failed to build themselves only reverted to civil wars. Nation-building requires leadership, vision and the right policies. In this regard there are role models such as China and Japan, which were one time socially and economically as poor as South Sudan is today, but due to the devotion and the right kind of planning on the part of their leaderships, they became economic giants. This is the question then to be addressed by South Sudan, that whether it looks to such role models, or continue towards a path of self-destruction and war.

Notes & References

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