

South Sudan's Peace Prospects and Possible scenarios



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On 9th July 2011, Jubilation and hope filled the hearts of many. South Sudan, the world's youngest nation, was born after decades of fighting with the then Khartoum Islamic and Arab regimes: desolations, annihilation, despair and loss were the order of the day. It was the birth of a nation and the promise of a fresh start as the nation took its first steps in what many perceived to have been the lasting peace beyond their life time.

There was high expectation for growth and many believed they would not see another violent conflict in the country they fought so hard and so long for. Unfortunately, they were wrong. The road to prosperity took a sharp bypass on 15th December 2013 when fighting broke out in Juba and quickly spread to many parts of South Sudan. More than 1,000,000 people fled their homes; some to within South Sudan and others to neighboring countries such as Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia and Kenya.

As a result, a lot of attention has been paid to the negative side of South Sudan's ethnic groups and diverse cultures. While we wait for international community to investigate and make public all violations of human rights that are happening, we also need to shed light on South Sudan's peace prospect and possible scenarios. In this analytical article, we need to put-on the eye glasses of common people of South Sudan. Looking out from the grassroots into and through the torn political fabric of this nascent nation, may foster a sense of nationalism and a peaceful prospect for South Sudan.

To bring South Sudanese into the reality of the matter, there is need to in all conscience accept the fact that a violent conflict that deviated from a political dimension to an ethnic one is real and serious. One of the major factors contributing to the conflict is that the elites of our communities, nation and especially the politicians took a grave gravitating advantage over their ignorant ethnic communities to hide their political aspirations. These ignorant communities were mobilized to make the whole political saga looks like ethnic. Because of high level of illiteracy, lack of understanding on national issues and lack of responsible political vision on the side of political leaders; the political war of transforming SPLM into a democratic, transparent and formidable political party took an ethnic dimension. But wait a minute; was there something positive despite all these negatively voiced issues on ethnicity? Many may answer 'NO' but I would say 'YES'. During the period of the commonly regarded as ethnic killing in Juba, Bor, Malakal and Bentiu, there were exceptional men and women that

rose above and beyond their tribal boundaries and went extra miles to save the lives of those that do not come from their own ethnic group. Unlike the Kenyan after poles violent, South Sudanese never killed their own family members. No man has killed his wife because she comes from the other ethnic group and no woman has killed her husband because of ethnic division. These are positive signs that South Sudan's social fabrics are not torn and are intact. Peace and reconciliation could possibly begin from here. The recently release of four political detainees: Majak d'Agoot Atem, Oyai Deng Ajak, Ambassador Lul and Pagan Amum Okiech was another positive move towards peace in the country.

The president like some of those ordinary South Sudanese who risk their own lives to save the lives of those men and women who do not come from their tribes, should go an extra mile to acquit those of Ladu Gore, Taban Deng Gai and Dr. Riek Machar. This later move would open a way for a quick and lasting peace to be signed. Dr. Machar, Taban and Gore would be reluctant to sign an agreement if they still know that they would be held hostage and probably executed for treason charges. Not acquitting the three would delay and possibly hinder peace process. This issue of Justice and accountability is equally very essential but should be left to the International community to investigate and possibly called on those leaders that have committed atrocities and crime against humanity to answer those charges either at the African Union Court or at The Hague. These court trials should be conducted by non-partisan non South Sudanese and outside South Sudan.

On the other hand, what are the possible scenarios of the peace agreement being brokered by IGAD in Addis Ababa? Does power sharing brings a lasting peace or does it act as a pain killer for a specific period of time and then war resumes once again? Are South Sudanese willing to take up arms against each other again? What does power sharing means to the ordinary South Sudanese?

There are debates and discussions on the prospect of power sharing both at the national and at the international level. Power sharing between Dr. Riek Machar and President Kiir has both negative and positive outcomes from the perspectives of a common person. The positive part of it is that it would yield to a currently desperately needed peace. But for how long will this peace last?

Let's assume of a power sharing agreement between former Vice President Dr. Machar and President Kiir. Since the whole issue has taken an ethnic dimension, it would give an expression of Dinka – Nuer power sharing. Then what would the other more than 60 tribes of South Sudan do? In order to be part of governance, there would be a possibility for them to take up arms at different levels. Should Dr. Machar become the Vice President of the new transitional government, then what would James Wani Igga do? He may possibly organize some Barri boys against the "*Jenge*" and kill many innocent women and children so that he could sign an Agreement that might take him to be 1st or 2nd Vice President of the Republic. I would correctly call this scenario as a Somalia-one scenario.

In my view, the second Somalia scenario in South Sudan would be if the power sharing agreement is signed and implemented would result into the two parties re-arming their factions for a preparation for another possible war within. Learning from the past history of the Sudan and South Sudan would help us discern issues that may take this country to another civil war within itself. After the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) with Khartoum in 2005, no one new that there was a possibility of an accident that would claim the life of a founding father of SPLM; Dr. John Garang de Mabior. With this forthcoming agreement, this should be carefully thought of and dealt with. The greatest fear

would be if power sharing agreement between president Kiir and Dr. Machar is reached. Dr. Machar may be the vice president according to the agreement. Any possibility of any accident to either of the two and God forbid would be attributed to the other party and this may further complicate the deteriorating situation all together. If anything happens to Dr. Machar, the Nuer would not hesitate to say it's the Dinka and if anything happens to President Kiir, the Dinka would not falter to say it's the Nuer. To the interest of public peace and avoiding such incidences, the following recommendations would make sense for a lasting peace and for a democratic South Sudan.

A shared transitional government between Dr. Machar and President Kiir would once again put South Sudan into another possible future war within itself and possibly on a larger ethnic ground. There could be even worst more killings than what was recently experienced in Central, Jonglei, Upper Nile and Unity States. Dr. Riek Machar is a former Vice President who was relieved from his duties like many other South Sudanese political leaders who were once ministers and were relieved. Dr. Machar in one of his statements after his relieve acknowledged the move by the president and pointed out that any political differences were to be ironed out democratically and within the SPLM context. I believe arming and killing the citizens of South Sudan was not part and parcel of what Dr. Machar meant. However, it has evidently and undeniably happened before our eyes!

In my view, the animosity and hostility is still very high and fresh in the hearts and minds of many in South Sudan. A power sharing transitional government would only be long lasting if two things are done: A transitional government where Kiir Mayar-dit remains the president of the Republic and Dr. Riek Machar becomes a Contesting president. This means that Dr. Machar should form his political party but would nominate some of his senior members to be in the cabinet while preparing for the forthcoming internationally observed and monitored elections in South Sudan.

Security arrangement is very significant in the forthcoming peace talks in Addis Ababa. Once the agreement is reached, the safest way is to reintegrate those SPLA-in-Opposition soldiers into the SPLA. Only those that were on the government payroll to be re-integrated while those that the government had mobilized for national defense together with those recruited by SPLA -in - Opposition get disarmed and re-integrated into their communities. The National Legislative Assembly should create a national defense bill that transforms the SPLA into a national army of South Sudan with equal regional representation based on population census of 2008. On the security arrangement, there should be a major and serious screening of those to be in the army based on international standard of military rules and regulations. The same must apply to all organize forces within the country.

In conclusion, the Principle of establishing South Sudan government of National Unity (GoNU-SS) would be a possibility to reaching lasting peace in the country. All the other registered political parties must be represented in the cabinet. This government should have a mandate to re-establish a transparent and democratic system before elections are held. Only through consensus building that will refocus South Sudan on the road to peace, development and prosperity.