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## A Plan B Peace Proposal for South Sudan

Considering the bleak situation at the IGAD Plus negotiating table and today's failed deadline for the peace-talks, I would also like to offer some concrete proposals for possible inclusion in any "Plan B" approach. I hope you will not find it presumptuous of me to offer some preliminary thoughts on this matter.

Personally, I have never been optimistic about the prospects of forging a durable peace agreement through the negotiation strategies currently being pursued. I have thought long and hard, however, about a different peace-making strategy that, to the best of my knowledge, is not anyone's radar but which holds promise of succeeding where so many previous international peace-making attempts have failed.

This peace-making model is not rooted in "Western/International" traditions of justice and peace. Instead, it elaborates upon explicit and implicit South Sudanese concepts of "war," "government," "justice," "responsibility," "peace-making" and the like, which differ in crucial ways from those commonly assumed by engaged regional and international peace-negotiators, donors and diplomats. Moreover, my "Plan B" aspires to an immediate reduction of the violence in those areas where it has been raging most intensely (such as in Unity, Jonglei, Upper Nile, Warrap, N. BEG, Lakes States). I acknowledge that a different but inter-related set of peace-promoting strategies is necessary to protect more peaceful regions (including much of greater Equatoria).

With that caveat in mind, my Plan B suggestions build directly on the values, experience and worldview of those South Sudanese men, women and children who have experienced the brunt of the violence thus far. I include rank-and-file gun-bearers, both civilian and non-civilian, on all sides of the conflict.

My proposed "Plan B" approach does not require any immediate action by or support from the war's principle belligerents. No need to strong-arm President Salva Kiir, Dr. Riek Machar, Peter Gatdet, Paul Malong, etc. into "accepting" its basic terms. However, it does require a simple (but radical) reframing of the root causes of this war and of the international community's role in helping to resolve it in the eyes of

concerned international partners, such as the US, UK and Norwegian governments.

Indeed, if considered with an open mind, the approach I have recommend would immediately help to de-politicize, de-militarize and de-ethnicize both the violence on the ground as well as the frustrated peace-negotiation process. What's more, I am convinced that the conceptual reframing I have in mind would win widespread approval among South Sudanese across all regions upon its announcement; and it would be very difficult, politically, for Salva Kiir or Riek Machar to reject openly.

There are many dimensions to the proposed plan, which I would be happy to discuss through a less one-sided medium. However, I offer here a few of the components of Plan B, with a reassurance that I have many ideas about how to structure and implement the plan in ways that would generate cooperation rather than resistance from specific interest groups in South Sudan as well as the national interests of key regional players.

Briefly, the basic model I am proposing begins with the recognition that there are basically two kinds of "war" in the eyes of South Sudanese: government wars and homeland wars, each with its own structure and logic.

In the eyes of most South Sudanese (including those bearing the guns), the post-mid December 2013 eruption of violence is not viewed as a "government war," in local understandings of this term. Rather, for some it started out as a "homeland war." For others, it degenerated into that default category, which is governed by logic of the feud. In this case the "blood feud" is being waged between "government" and "the people." For most South Sudanese, the concept of "government" is broader than the official RSS administration headed by Salva Kiir, for it encompasses the political and military forces of the SPLA-IO as well. For many in the opposition, this war was understood as a "blood feud" with the government from its opening shots. Both Gatdet and Koang initially rebelled after receiving word that some of their close family members were murdered by SPLA forces loyal to Kiir during the first day or two of the house-to-house searches targeting "Nuer" government officials and civilians in Juba.

It is impossible to end a "blood-feud" through a power-sharing agreement among the "government" officials responsible for the

violence. The only way to peacefully resolve a blood feud is for the collective party responsible for lethal violence (in this case, the "government" broadly conceived) to pay appropriate bloodwealth compensation to surviving relatives of those killed. Without a formal acknowledgment specifying the individuals killed and the ritualized transfer of compensation payments to the families concerned, a "feud" will not end. There can be no lasting peace established locally or nationally. Instead, the unresolved "feud" can and will spread to infect other families and other regions, particularly when there are powerful players who have more to gain, politically and economically, from perpetuating the war. Local concepts of bloodwealth compensation contrast with the concept of war "reparations" as conventionally understood. Compensation payments must be paid by the collective party responsible for the "homicide" and given over to the surviving relatives of the persons slain. Such transfers are traditionally negotiated by local government chiefs, supported by respected, non-government, community leaders, including local elders, prophets, Christian leaders, etc.

In other words, it is impossible, in my opinion, to resolve South Sudan's current civil war without embracing local concepts, practices and traditions of "feud settlement" carried out on a significant scale. This would require a considerable redistribution of "government" funds in the form of "bloodwealth" transfers to grassroots families and communities. Not all money is the same, however. Were donor nations to establish a fresh "compensation" fund and proceed to develop mechanism for identifying and distributing such funds to eligible families, it would not settle the matter. For the payments to have feud-settling validity, they must be recognized as "government" money/wealth.

"Government" compensations funds can (and should) draw upon some of the vast herds of cattle looted and held by Salva Kiir and Riek Machar's rival "government" armies over the past 20 months. However, the best way to establish a "government" compensation fund would be to track down and collect some of the billions of dollars that have been stolen by "government" officials (including military officials) over the past 10 years. All such money collected from "corrupt" government officials is by definition "government money" and entirely appropriate (in local ways of thinking) to serve as the source of "government" compensation payments to the families of those slain. This is, in my opinion, the easiest and only sure way of quelling the fighting and creating durable peace in those areas of South Sudan that have been most directly devastated.

More importantly, were key international players to announce in the near future a "Plan B" initiative that incorporated these "twinned" programs for quelling the violence, such an announcement would immediately alter the power dynamics of rival forces fighting it out at ground level as well as those struggling for dominance in Addis Ababa.

Although there are many other dimensions of this basic plan B, it can be simplified down to a commitment to two parallel processes: a "financial forensics" funding process and a government bloodwealth compensation program modeled on nationally recognized practices governing the peaceful resolution of "homeland wars." Some of this money should also be reserved for regions that have been indirectly rather than directly affected by the violence--but this additional reserve fund would not be treated nor classified in the same way as "bloodwealth" payments provided to the families of those killed. A national discussion about how to best target and prioritize these payments could be developed. My vote would be for prioritizing "widows with children." Strange as it may sound, these bloodwealth payments must include at least some livestock, for the simple reason that "money is bloodless" and thus not a symbolically appropriate medium for settling feuds, particularly within pastoralist oriented communities.

Although these ideas may appear novel, I can assure you that they are deeply embedded in South Sudanese historical and cultural perspectives. I also suggest that this twinned program approach has numerous short-term and long-term advantages over more conventional solutions that international peace-negotiators have proposed thus far.

Here is a short-list:

1. This reframing would immediately defuse current processes of political and ethnic polarization in favor of a reinforced humanity and shared South Sudanese identity. For example, the only identity distinction of relevance to the financial forensics program is whether or not someone is demonstrably a "thief." Politically malleable regional and ethnic distinctions are irrelevant. Additionally, it will be far easier to catch a government "thief" and justify stripping him/her of all governmental legitimacy rather than do so on the basis of a lengthy, court-validated, conviction of gross human rights abuses--especially since no established court process and, more importantly, no witness

protection program currently exist. Salva Kiir's famous letter announcing his knowledge of the names of 75 current and past government officials responsible for looting 4 billion dollars worth of government funds prior to the country's independence would be a good place to start. Riek Machar, after he was dismissed, has spoken repeatedly about the evils of government kleptocrats. He, too, would find it politically difficult at this point to object to an internationally supervised reclamation process. Investigative support from the Kenya bank entrusted with South Sudanese government funds could be secured through a variety of incentives. The key is to devise a "hybrid" forensic team that will be and will be seen as thorough and impartial.

2. Similarly, the victim identification/family compensation program inherently transcends myriad regional, ethnic and political distinctions in favor of locally managed government investigations of the circumstances of specific deaths and the appropriate payments to be made. This program could be pre-structured to guard against temptations by interested parties to inflate official lists of those slain or otherwise skew the integrity of bloodwealth compensation payments. For example, the compensation program could be progressively rolled out in ways that mirror the historical evolution of the war, beginning with the late December 2013 violence in Juba and Bor and proceeding from these symbolic critical "hotspots" to Unity State, Malakal and other regions. The tempo of this "roll out" would also be determined by recovery rates of stolen government funds.

3. These "twinning" Plan B programs, if carried out responsibly and with close international supervision, would go a long way in restoring national hope and pride in the possibility of South Sudanese establishing a more just, responsible, and protective "government" administration in the years ahead.

Best wishes,  
Sharon Hutchinson