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Article 1

South Sudan: Are there grounds for Over Pessimism?

ICG has called for “respected mediators”. We are yet to see that with a “process”. Nigeria, IGAD, The US, AU, the UN are among the mediators who are in the radar screen. No process can come out of that. There needs to be a “process” and “a mediator” and then supporters of the process. After such bloody confrontations and atrocities, a process of “De-escalation” of hostilities needs to be put in place as a prerequisite to a mediation process.

If Secretary General Ban Ki Moon asked Museveni to mediate, there is something grossly wrong. We very much doubt that piece of news. Uganda already has 500 strong army guarding Juba including the airport. Does President Kiir trust or does not trust his army to resort to that? The Kenyans have their own forces. Was that really necessary for evacuation of citizens? The Ethiopians and Eritreans have large communities all over South Sudan, why did they not send in forces to protect and evacuate their citizens?

No “Foreigners” are reported killed indiscriminately in Juba or Bor. News are coming of small numbers and one Sudanese. Killing of Ugandans and Kenyans by Southern Sudanese was taking place more often before the December conflict. Discontent with their presence in South Sudan is not new.

The careful Ethiopians have said “we are here to understand the situation on the ground”. What is the situation on the ground? It is very fluid and dynamic. There is a level of “stability” and consolidation of positions that each party to the conflict needs to attain before they will be willing to engage in de-escalation or mediation.

Is this a conflict that the IGAD with its very limited capabilities can address? Has IGAD got any soft and hard power to bring pressure to bear?

The Troika is slow.

Norway is depending on Hilda Johnson who wears two hats and is in the habit of bullying and elbowing everyone else.

Envoy Booth has just arrived in Juba.

The UK’s role is not clear

They were all taken by surprise and the slack time of December/January. The mass exodus and evacuation of Western personnel has exacerbated the situation of panic.

No external pressure or intervention will bear fruits while the guns are still firing without internal political will. While Kiir is approachable in Juba, Machar is in Bor/Jonglei with massive fire power and a lot of “Black Holes” or unknowns. President Obama and company are making a big mistake by resorting to threats of ending financial and capacity support to South Sudan. Other than insensitivity, who cares at these times whether or not aid comes.

While President Kiir is not in his tribal land, Dr. Machar and his generals are (most of Jonglei, most of Unity and about half of Upper Nile). With the SPLA as a national army not yet fully integrated and harmonized as a regular army and with several veteran officers of the liberation war not willing to relocate and preferring a county commissioner's position to military promotions, we have several localized loyalties that are pockets for smooth switching of allegiance.

The assumptions by the US that their air force could "Just" come in evacuate "Europeans" from Bor without coordinating with Gadet and his forces showed naivety. When they coordinated with Gadet they landed and evacuated their citizens and others.

Dinkas make up about 10% of South Sudan population. Nuers make up about 6%. Headcounts, there are more Nuers in the SPLA than any other single tribal group (Including the Dinka). This is due to historical circumstances in 83-88 when the rebellion against Khartoum started in the East Bank of the Nile and the flight of William Nyong Nyong with every able man and woman over 18.

The three main states where there are Nuers in numbers also have Dinkas. (See attached map). While Dinkas are separated into East and West by the Sudd (Swamps) and the Nuers, the Nuers are connected and have corridors of passage. Oil is almost entirely in Nuer Land. The SPLA is about 140,000 strong with trigger happy soldiers and little "Induction" or integration into disciplined regulars. Juba spree is example of that. It remains a mystery to be decoded why President Kiir ordered the disarming of Nuers in his Presidential Guard and why those who surrendered from the 100 Nuers were shot in cold blood.

There is history, legacy and rivalry between Dinka Bor and Dinka Wau. We also need to read that to know what may happen in the coming days. It is not simply Nuer-Dinka issue. Dinka Bor may not forgive Dr. Machar for the 1991 Massacre. But they will also not forget or forgive Dinka Bahr El Ghazal for disobeying Dr. Garang's instruction to run to the rescue of Bor and the forces of Bahr El Ghazal refused the C-in-C orders responding that was the job of Bor Dinka in the SPLA!

The massive cache of arms purchased for the SPLA from SWAPO at the independence of Namibia in 1990, paid for by President Jerry Rawlings and Lonrho Boss Tiny Roland and stored in Maban is responsible for the extensive prevalence of Small Arms (SA) and Light Weapons (LW) in the area and is still an element of strength for the Luo Nuer. This explains the arming of the White Army estimated at about 10,000 and that Machar may bring into the battle field once he needs to support Gadet. 6000 of them marched on the Murule tribe land in 2013, The White Army is mostly way in the very East of Jonglei and some are in Gambella.

To note, "vengeance" is almost "sacrosanct" for the Nuers. Time is not an issue. Hence in any accord reached to end the conflict that element needs to be addressed. Review our 13 minutes interview with Radio Canada International (Arabic).

Where the Equatorians will stand (especially East Equatoria) will have a big bearing on the outcome of the confrontation. Tribes such as the Didinga and the Latuka may not easily forget the atrocities committed on them by Dinka elements of the SPLA during the liberation war.

Knowledge of the topography around Juba and in the Eastern Bank is greatly in favour of Machar and company.

The roads to Upper Nile go through Jonglei. The roads to Unity go through Western Bahr El Ghazal or Jonglei/Unity. If the forces loyal to Dr. Machar in East Equatoria manage to take Nimule in Central Equatoria, then the only tarmac highway in South Sudan will be under their control and the only entry for Ugandan and Kenyan goods will be through Yei as Lokichokio/Narus venue is in East Equatoria. We need to understand the military landscape as well as the demography landscape and the topography landscape.

Is the US really behind President Kiir?

We need to read Secretary Kerry's statement carefully **"Last night, I called South Sudanese President Kiir and urged him, *as president of all of South Sudan, to protect all South Sudanese citizens and work toward reconciliation.* We recalled the difficult decisions that led to the remarkable moment when so many stood in long lines for a referendum to give birth to South Sudan, knowing all too well that the toughest decisions were still to come. Now is the time for leadership that makes those decisions through dialogue,"** Kerry said in a statement

What is he saying? Where does #1 ally of South Sudan stand from President Kiir?

World leaders cannot keep saying "all sides"! Each side has something to do to de-escalate the violence. We need to call a spade a spade.

There has been gross bad judgment from President Kiir at the outset and what is needed now is "damage control". May be an open apology will help. May be cessation of hostilities from one side may help; may be unconditional release of the political detainees will help. That will create a more conducive atmosphere to dialogue. We do not see "reconciliation" before "damage control". A quick look into John Burton's processes of mediation will confirm that.

If all of Unity falls to Machar we will have a completely different and new set of affairs. Over 80% of Unity State is Nuer. We cannot see how President Kiir and the main stream SPLA can keep it before a political settlement.

Upper Nile is where the serious casualties can occur if the violence is not contained. It is where GOS/SAF can easily intervene if they wish. The same goes for Unity. (Read Edward Lino's communiqué). A symptom to note is that no one is blaming Khartoum this time! They are sitting back and laughing in spite of the possible loss of revenue from passing oil.

With the mass of veteran politicians and officers in jail, street or in the bush, President Kiir has lost his national think tank. Gen Kuol Manyang is silent and he hails from Dinka Bor. It may not be long before he sides openly with Dinka Bor. Dr. Barnaba Marial, the Minister of Foreign Affairs seems to be the dynamo of the cabinet. He hails from Luo Nuer of Uyai in Uror County in Jonglei State.

Recommendations:

To the Government of Sudan: There is need for opening “corridors of tranquillity” across the common border between Sudan and South Sudan to facilitate humanitarian deliveries to the Northern States of South Sudan. Upper Nile, Unity and Northern Bahr El Ghazal can better be aided from Sudan than East Africa.

To the Western Nations: The Western Nations with citizens in South Sudan need to implement the evacuation of their citizens in a manner than does not exacerbate panic and mass exodus of Southerners.

As and when the war is over, may be the West can entertain funding “Nation Building” in South Sudan as priority to every other development theme. The shelved project of connecting all 10 states’ capitals with tarmac roads may need rethinking.

To the media: This is not the CAR, Somalia or the DRC. Whoever controls the SPLA, the Oil fields and the largest territory will come to Juba and rule. Over pessimism about South Sudan disintegrating may be the wrong judgement.

Sober and in-depth analyses are needed rather than inflammatory news and superficial analysis.

To President Kiir: An apology for your bad judgement, one-sided cease fire and general amnesty and unconditional release of political detainees.

To civil society: Show some visibility

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