

Ottawa
Friday, October-17-14

Article 55 on South Sudan

Developments in South Sudan Conflict: The Possible Dilemmas of the SPLM/A-IO: Re-Entry and Field Visibility

Our Articles 1 to 54 were situation analyses of the conflict in South Sudan. Our articles 4 (A), 4 (B) and 4 (C) were the first of our series on “Who is Who”. This article 55 is dedicated to the possible dilemmas of the SPLM/A-IO on two issues: Re Entry and Visibility in the Field

Introduction and definitions

John Burton, one of the icons of conflict resolution defines “**Re-Entry**” as follows

” The conflict resolution process is deeply analytical, leading to altered perspectives, radical changes in understanding of the points of view and motivations of the other party and consideration of options not previously entertained. The parties are frequently represented nominees of leaders, communities, or organizations in conflict. The nominees, having experiences this face-to-face analytical process, and having altered, sometimes fundamentally, their definition of the situation face a major problem of “*Re-entry*” when they report back to those whom they represent who have not had this experience.

The facilitator (should) constantly remind participants of this problem encouraging them to keep close and continued contact with their principals”

In short: Do not sign until you are sure what you sign will fly and be accepted by your party. Mini Arkou made this fatal mistake when he signed on the 2006 Abuja Agreement on Darfur through massive pressure from Hilary Benn of the UK and the “bully” Robert Zoellick of the USA. It was the Darfurians who told him “this is not what we want”.

We take this further:

Many a times, there are important stakeholders and players that are not at the negotiating table. In the case of Darfur/Abuja it was the masses of Darfurians in the IDP and refugee camps and Minni had to eat coal!

But why are we bringing this up now?

There are two paramount heroes in the eyes of the Nuers (except those who are still in the camp of the GRSS). Those are:

Peter Gadet
Koang Chuol Ranleah

There are certainly other heroes and gallant commanders on all sides to the conflict; but these 2 stand in their own category for the Nuers. They and others have to be satisfied with what the mediation team of the SPLM/A-IO agrees to and Dr. Riek or his delegate signs on.

That re-entry back either to such commanders who have the fire power or to the wider suffering community is key to durability of any agreement; conclusive and final or interim and partial.

Mediation must be aware of that and get off their damaging attitude to pressure to sign “right now”. That will not work and we do not care if they and their heads of state want to deceive themselves. We care that they do not deceive the people of South Sudan. “Under Duress” agreements do not live long. You do not believe us? Look no further than to your agreements so far signed.

A word to Gov Taban and Dr. Riek: Do not be intimidated to sign on any document without proper re-entry and consent from your commanders and power bases. IDPs and Refugees can make or break agreements. The Mediators? The Heads of State? Let them wait.

A word for the GRSS, which is in a different situation than the SPLM/A-IO:
There is no point in signing agreements that you know will not work and end up using them for political leverage and winning points against the SPLM/A-IO.

Visibility on the Ground of the top leadership of the SPLM/A-IO

This part of our note comes from a trackrecord of knowledge from the Civil War 1983-2005 and from the Justice Equality Movement of Darfur’s field commanding by Bahar Abu Garda before Dr. Khalil became aware that his absence from the field was wrong. Living in Europe and leaving Bahar in Darfur, transformed Bahar as the de facto C-in-C. This is also how Abdelwahid Nur lost to Minni in Darfur.

In the SPLA, this is why non-commissioned officers such as Kiir, Kuanyin and Nyon Bany were so close to their soldiers.

This is how Lagu flew away with the Anyanya and left Mortat, Agrey and others out in the cold.

It also comes from what we call “Concerned Citizens” from both the SPLM/A-IO controlled areas and the GRSS controlled areas who are talking to us from the ground in South Sudan and in diaspora. All of them are worried about the visible and long periods of absence of the top brass/leadership of the parties from the fields. The supporters of the SPLM/A-IO are worried about the cohesion of their leadership and the role model image that their fighters need to see on the ground. The supports of GRSS who have common sense are worried about the fragmentation of the opposition and its forces into factions and the additional hell than may break loose in South Sudan.

The same is leveled at President Kiir and his top men but with less concern as there is still the structure of “A State” in their camps.

A word to mediation:

We do not see a speedy end to this conflict. The TROIKA and the Ugandans can meet from here to eternity and levy all the sanctions they have under their wings; that will not end the conflict. It is in the interest of South Sudan, its regional neighbours and their friends at large to take issues seriously and not part-time and looking politically correct in front of cameras. Restructuring the Mediation Process, having the basic “command and control” of Mediation in place, defining Mediation Mandate and frame of work and treating the parties with dignity and respect is a first step. Thematic approach to the complex issues and segregating Primary Stakeholder from Secondary Stakeholders and abandoning hollow coined terms such as “All inclusivity” may also help.

You stick with the “Government” issue and you will see more failures. You will be attempting to put a roof on no columns. There is no government without security. That simple concept needs to bring “Security Arrangements” to the forefront of the talks.

The matter of the fact is that there are only two parties to the conflict. All the others are “secondary stakeholders” and do not have power to impact positively or negatively on the conflict.

One is intrigued, possibly surprised, by the parties’ current tangential mobility and visible lack of focus on the Mediation Process and its venue. Travel and meetings move from South Africa for the SPLM/A-IO, to Arusha for both¹, and then to Nairobi for the SPLM/A-IO. The 16th date passed and now it seems that the 20th date will pass without assembling back in Ethiopia..... and IGAD is in silence.

Or are those meetings and events part of Mediation?

An observation on Arusha: There is not ONE government official or CCM Party member with current executive portfolio. They are ALL (6 of them) (Former) officials. Brilliant move from Dar Es Salaam.

Stay well

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¹ 12 members of the GRSS delegation including Nhial. Ann Itto is not there, 10 SPLM/A-IO including Gov Taban and Mme Angelina, as for the ex-detainees they include Mme Rebecca (although she is not an ex-detainee) and Amum, Alor, Luk...all nine of them plus Mme Rebecca