

CIVIL WAR and THE CHALLENGES AHEAD IN SOUTH SUDAN

Güney Sudan'da İç Savaş ve Önündeki Zorluklar

 <https://doi.org/10.54429/seyad.1037115>

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Politik Ekonomik ve Sosyal Araştırmalar
Merkezi, Sakarya/TÜRKİYE

Center for Political, Economic and Social
Research, Sakarya/TURKEY

Atıf / Citation

Sarr, Fatoumatta. "Civil War and The Challenges Ahead in South Sudan". *Siyaset, Ekonomi ve Yönetim Araştırmaları Dergisi* 10/1 (2022), 53 - 70.

Makale Bilgisi

Makale Türü / Article Type: Araştırma Makalesi/ Research Article

Geliş Tarihi: 15.12.2021

Kabul Tarihi: 11.05.2022

Yayın Tarihi: 30.06.2022

Civil War and The Challenges Ahead in South Sudan

Abstract

South Sudan's recently ended civil war began shortly after gaining independence in 2013. The conflict grew out of proportion and became disastrous for the world's youngest nation. In 2014 pressure amid sanctions from the international community forced rival parties into a productive process of a peace deal. However, there was little success as both the rebel militia and the government anticipated the downfall of each other. January 2015 indicated a positive move: the parties agreed to a cease-fire and peace talks were outlined. Mediators and other neutral parties, on the other hand, must take advantage of the situation to ensure stability. Another year of war will undoubtedly lead to a division, which will ultimately endanger South Sudan's sovereignty. This article describes the causes of ethnic struggles, military operations, the consequences of war, the role of external forces, and how to reach peaceful solutions.

Keywords: South Sudan, civil war, peace negotiations, foreign influence, SPLA

Özet

Şu anda sonuçlandırılan Güney Sudan iç savaşı 2013'te başladı. Çatışma orantısız bir şekilde büyüdü ve dünyanın en genç ulusu için felaket oldu. 2014'te ABD ve diğer ülkelerden gelen yaptırımların ortasındaki baskı, muhalif tarafları üretken bir barış ve uzlaşma sürecine zorladı. Bununla birlikte, hem hükümet hem de isyancı güçler, diğerinin çöküşünü beklerken kendilerini sağlamlaştırdıkları için zayıf bir başarı elde edildi. Ocak 2015'teki gelişmeler olumlu bir hamleye işaret etti: taraflar ateşkese ulaştı ve barış görüşmelerinin ana hatları çizildi. Arabulucular ve diğer tarafsız taraflar ise istikrarı sağlamak için ateşkesten faydalanmalıdır. Çünkü bir yıl daha savaş, şüphesiz bir devlet olarak Güney Sudan'ın egemenliğini tehdit edecek olan parçalanmayla sonuçlanacaktır. Bu makale etnik kavgaların nedenini, askeri faaliyetleri, savaşın Güney Sudan halkı için sonucunu, dış güçlerin rolünü ve barışçıl bir çözüme ulaşmanın yollarını özetlemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Güney Sudan, İç savaş, Barış görüşmeleri, Dış etki, SPLA

Introduction

After almost 40 years of unending war between South Sudanese rebels and the Bashir regime, the South voted for a referendum to gain independence from Sudan. The country has been overwhelmed by conflict for several years, hampering several aspects of development. This includes the achievement of basic human rights, infrastructure, education and formal administrative facilities. A lot of people were killed in the unending civil war. Despite the wealth in natural resources, including vast arable land and massive oil fields, immense humanitarian needs persisted even after independence. State-affiliated embezzlement decelerated post-war recovery. In 2013, Sudan received unprecedented humanitarian aid and its needs are assumed to continue to grow substantially.

In 2011, South Sudan achieved independence with tremendous international celebration. However, the country fell into another civil conflict in 2013 when President Salva Kiir got into a disagreement with his Vice President Riek Machar. The South once again got into a political and ethnic war that was rapidly spreading across most parts of the country. This outcome led to the death of thousands of men, women and children. The international media suggests the renewed conflict was based on tribal lines and illogical decisions by elected officials. Some specialists however disclosed that a power tussle within the Sudanese People's Liberation Military (SPLM); coupled with an over militarized society, and the fragile foundation of South Sudan's government reignited the war (UNMISS, 2014b; Rolandsen, 2015:164). All these circumstances combined have resulted in the escalation of violence. After the comprehensive peace agreement deal was signed, many questions arose. Was the South ready for independence? Who benefits from the prolonged civil war? And why have globally-sponsored peace negotiations failed?

The purpose of this work is to review the state of events that led to the conflict in the South and to evaluate the outcome of the war after years of ongoing combat. This article also summarizes efforts to address political and economic implications, humanitarian needs and find peaceful solutions. It finds out why ethnic hostility was the key factor for the shift from party-political conflict into massive violence. This research proposes an approach to ensure that the void left by the previous peace agreement is closed by involving local stakeholders. It proposes the formation of a fair governing body that restore public trust. This can be achieved through better management and resource

allocation, reform, re-educating of national security forces. Not only to guarantee the integrity of the state but also to ensure the monopoly of state power. All of this can be achieved by adopting costly and impartial constitutional amendments.

1. Historical Events Leading to War

In the south, there is a history of ethnic struggles and clashes between the fragment militias and SPLA (Sudanese People's Liberation Military). The two rival groups involved, the Dinka and Nuer, have also been competing for several social issues over the years, including pastures and cattle water. This endless conflict was primarily the result of the Khartoum government's political, economic, religious and cultural alienation of the South (Ottaway and El Sadany, 2012, 4). However, in 2005, a signed peace deal (Comprehensive Peace Agreement) led to the independence of the South in 2011 (Jok, 2015, 15). In terms of independence, the young country faced the same challenges as other newly liberated countries. Coupled with the diverse ideologies of local leaders, competition for political power created a situation in which communities reorganized and used ethnicity to advance their cause (Cheeseman, 2015, 813). South Sudan's independence has little or no impact on other parts of the country where violence has spread due to the inherent failure of the treaty (Africa Program Report N° 154, 2009, 2; Ajak et al., 2013, 224).

Under the CPA peace deal, the administrative, financial and humanitarian damages left by the war was devastating. During the 22-year conflict, approximately 4 million people immigrated to safer settlements, more than 600,000 were displaced internally and about 2 million were killed. Adding to the demolished homes, arable farms, and infrastructure, the relentless effort to sponsor the conflict served as a barrier to developing the country's depleted education system, healthcare, food and other necessary public services (Hanzich, 2011, 40).

December 2013 marked the emergence of political tensions among key South Sudanese leaders which led to immense violence. Some scholars believed that oil is the main catalyst of the South Sudanese civil war; and was caused by rival parties wanting to have control over the country's natural resources (Sachs and Warner, 2001, 827-238; Ballentine and Nitzschke, 2005, 6-7). But, Sefa-Nyarko (2016, 194) argued that the conflict was not caused primarily by the struggle for natural resources. The 2013 political dispute

coincided with already existing ethnic and political impediments, igniting yet another armed clash and ethnic killings in the capital, Juba, and its surroundings (Johnson, 2014,168).

The conflict intensified quickly in the first week after a fight broke out between factions of Juba's SPLA soldiers (Ottaway and El-Sadany, 2012, 3). What started the fighting have remained uncertain, however reports show that on 16-17 December, violence erupted in several parts of the city, Juba (Rolandsen, 2015, 163). Hundreds of residents were reported dead while thousands of others escaped to UN compounds for safety (Johnson, 2014,301). Some 7 million people are at risk of malnutrition, out of which 4.9 million are in dire need of urgent assistance. South Sudan has more than one million internally displaced people. Over 350,000 people have fled to neighbouring countries; all these figures continued to rise as the conflict escalates (Jamie, 2017, 4). State troops are reported to have targeted the Nuer ethnic group in intense searches (Human Rights Watch, 2014b; Johnson 2014, 170). The South Sudanese army is allegedly responsible for the majority of civilian deaths (African Union 2014,106, 276). Most of SPLM's opposition leaders were immediately arrested, and on December 16th, President Salva Kiir issued a statement that there had been an attempted coup (Reuters, 2013; Janssen, 2017, 12).

President Salva Kiir pointed fingers at his former second in command, Riek Machar, accusing him of a coup plot (Vertin, 2018, 2). To this day, Machar denied the charges and said the claims were unfounded (Blanchard, 2016, 1). After his dismissal, Riek Machar became agitated. He then join the armed opposition of the Nuer rebels and become their leader. This event caused furious enmity and bloodshed between the Dinka and Nuer people. Hundreds of citizens died while fleeing attacks seemingly targeted towards Machar's ethnic group, the Nuer. Machar later declared a retaliation with the help of high-ranking Nuer commanders. The fight which initially started as a loyalist-defiant soldier conflict would soon revolve into a civilian massacre (Adwok Nyaba, 2014, 104-117; African Union, 2014, 106-276).

The ruthless battle lasted for about 20 months as local bodies gradually made progress in promoting a peace agreement (Taulbee et al., 2014, 78; Vertin, 2018, 1). Occasionally, the parties recommit to the ceasefire agreement that was signed in January 2014. But this has been violated many times. In May 2014, the parties proposed an agreement to form

an interim government. However, they did not agree on terms and responsibilities. After several unsuccessful attempts to sign a peace agreement; threats of international sanctions, including an arms embargo led the parties to finally reach a peace deal in August 2015 (De Vries and Schomerus, 2017, 338). Salva Kiir signed the deal a week after Riek Machar, who allegedly called the deal divisive and sabotages South Sudan as a community (Blackings 2016, 7; Nyadera, 2018, 74).

While both sides publicly showed commitment in the execution of a ceasefire, developments derailed immediately and the conflict continued (Knopf, 2016, 12). The large-scale clash between the parties subsided, but the war continued. The parties repetitively violated the negotiating period but later joined forces to create a transitional government (Transitional Government of National Unity (TGNU) at the end of April 2016. Riek Machar went to Juba to serve as the Vice President of the interim government (Baker, 2016, 20-27). However, the formation of a unified government (sharing of power) did not stop the war. The conflict continued in places that were more peaceful when the war began. The October 2015 decree by President Kiir, which divided the country's largest 10 states into 28, also seemed to accelerate the conflict. Observers say the redefined borders changed the regional tribal balance and therefore increased indigenous rivalries over land and other resources (Nyadera, 2018, 74). Observers however believe that locations with the most oil fields lie in lands belonging to the Nuer (Jamie, 2017, 4).

2. Dynamics of The War

This war reflects underlying tensions and distrust that existed among ethnic groups and Sudan's leadership from (1983- 2005). While the conflict was initially labelled as a North. Vs. South war, internal friction between the rebel commanders in the South, in the 1990s, interrupted the South's efforts for independence (Warner, 2016, 6-13). SPLM leaders have delayed the path to self-actualization by competing for power and promoting tribalism. It is important to note that both sides committed atrocities. Khartoum (government in Sudan) sponsored/caused SPLM divisions by mobilizing, sponsoring and giving arms to breakaway groups, including forces led by Machar (Nyadera, 2018, 3). However, while large rebel groups made amends earlier in the 2000s, some breakaway militias held relentless operations around the Upper Nile region (Janssen, 2017, 13).

A peace deal (CPA) was signed in 2005, however, relations between the Sudanese government and SPLM remain tense (Jok, 2015, 1-5). In 2012, outraged by Khartoum's decision to transport and export oil via its territories, the South Sudanese government stopped oil production for over a year. This decision along with other border disputes caused an economic shock to both countries (AFDB, OECD, UNDP, UNECA, 2012).

As the war was ending, some of the SPLM leaders had put their grudges aside to promote peace. But, ethnic and social conflicts continued to grow in the midst of immense government responsibility, human, administrative, and infrastructural capacity constraints. South Sudan also became oversupplied with small arms, inter-ethnic violence prevailed and gradually appeared more politicized (O'Brien, 2009, 11). After independence, progressive work on the new constitution was stalled and the power struggle among the high-ranking members of the SPLM intensified. As part of President Kiir's cabinet shuffle in July 2013, arch-rival Riek Machar alongside other key cabinet members was dismissed. President Kiir deliberately blamed Machar and 75 government authorities for corruption (Appiah Afriyie et al., 2020, 36). Tensions increased when Machar and colleagues accused Kiir of becoming an active authoritarian, resulting in ruthless violence that broke out in December 2013 (Rolandsen et al., 2015, 89).

The peace process agreement began in January 2014. IGAD-backed peace negotiations were held in Ethiopia, Addis Ababa. Both the rebel group and government agreed that a comprehensive political solution is an ideal solution to solve Sudan's problems and that the dialogue and constitutional process should begin after the rules of that dialogue have been established. May 9th 2014, marked the signing of an agreement by the two leaders, they called for a comprehensive interim government. But this also failed. Violations of the cease-fire were reported only two days later, and expectations for a swift agreement soon diminished. Mediation fell into an "au fait" pattern (return to conflict) over power-sharing and a permanent cease-fire (Nyadera, 2018,75).

3. Consequences of The War

South Sudan is ranked by the United Nations as one of the places with the highest humanitarian status in the world, along with Syria, Iraq and Yemen. But it is the only one in Africa (Blanchard, 2016, 4). United Nations suggest that around 50,000 locals have died, however, an accurate death toll estimate is unavailable. Observers suggest the death toll could be higher. Approximately 2 million people are believed to have been displaced from December 2013. At least 1.9 million are internally displaced people, while the refugee count surpassed 1 million. An estimate of more than 160,000 people seeks refuge in Uganda according to the UN. The majority of those who fled to Uganda are women and children. Those who fled the war reported threats of rape, robbery and child abduction from both the military and rebels (Rolandsen, 2015, 355).

It is likewise hard to determine the number of victims, those who were killed during the war combined with the deaths caused by the effects of war (illnesses and malnutrition). Entire communities lost their source of income and livelihood became unbearable. People were forced to leave their homes in search of safer settlements. UN estimates showed that nearly 1.9 million were destitute and displaced; including an estimate of 470,000 who ran to nearby countries (OCHA, 2014, 9).

The war interrupted agriculture and trade. The price of commodities; including food has increased, leaving many not able to fulfil fundamental needs. In August 2016, the annual inflation rate rose to about 730% and food costs rose by about 850%. Raiding and stealing of food reserves from warehouses discouraged international agencies. Logistic challenges and uncertainties also required the delivery of food by airdrop (Jamie, 2017, 5). Government soldiers reportedly plundered the main camp of Juba's World Food Program during the July battle, resulting in the loss of 4,500 tonnes of food. This would have supported 220,000 people a month. Due to excessive demand, aid agencies have shifted their attention from durable development to emergency aid (BIP Inc., 2018, 155).

The conflict has weakened the already fragile economic system and financial institutions. The economic crisis was aggravated by falling oil prices (January 2015). The oil quality from South Sudan is poor, therefore it is sold cheaply in international markets (nothing new for most of Africa's raw materials and natural resources). A substantial percentage of the remaining profits are then paid as shipping costs to Sudan. This factor has led to

the closure of many other oil fields in a state of insecurity (Jamie, 2017, 5). A decrease in oil production saw a move from 500,000 barrels per day to 130,000 barrels; causing absolute economic injury to a country that depends entirely on oil production (Appiah Afriyie et al., 2020, 40). In addition, the war discouraged foreign investment, and many businesses had to close. Government reserves may be exhausted and the financial problems may intensify as conflict continues (Frontier Economics, 2015, 5).

United Nations estimate that over 50% of the country was in need of immediate humanitarian assistance and an extra 40% of the populace face severe starvation (Jamie, 2017, 4). As harvest season approaches in August, food security was expected to improve. However, experts observe that the extent of starvation in certain regions in the country which is dealing with feasible famine is “unprecedented”. Inadequate statistical data also reportedly avert aid agencies’ potential to decide whether or not situations meet the technical definition of famine (BIP Inc., 2018, 155).

4. Human Rights Problems

Human rights advocates argue that assaults on civilians and UN officials by both government and opposition parties during the war could constitute crimes against humanity. United Nations Mission (UNMISS) has reported that serious human rights abuses have occurred at an incredible level since the beginning of the war. UNICEF also estimates that about 16,000 children were drafted as child soldiers during the war. Children were killed in targeted attacks (UN, 2014, 6). Conflict-related sex crimes became rampant, and UN officials have expressed concern about "intentional rape," especially targeting specific ethnic groups. The UN Committee of Experts, which was formed under the Security Council resolution 2206 found that all those involved in the war participated in attacks on civilians as part of their military plans. In 2016, the United Nations recorded 217 sexual violence in Juba alone. Many were carried out by national soldiers (Rolandsen, 2015, 355).

When the conflict began, the African Union commissioned the South Sudan Investigation Commission (AUCISS) to look into human rights abuses committed during the war. The purpose of this investigation is to provide solutions on ways to ensure truth, justice and reconciliation. AUCISS published its final report in October 2015 under the leadership of former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo. The outcome showed that human rights

abuses were systematic and, in most cases, extreme. The report indicates a rapid spread of violence in mid-2015, as the opposing parties struggled to acquire and retain territory in order to gain more power in peace negotiations (BIP Inc., 2018, 157).

5. Foreign Interest: Us and China's Quest for Oil

China and the United States are currently in a battle to strengthen their control over Africa's soil and natural resources. This fight for Africa's resources has long existed. What is new, however, is the intensified competition over energy resources between the U.S and its major competitors particularly China for strategic control. The reliance on energy resources of developed nations from developing nations is rising and fuelling competition between these two major powers. The International Energy Agency estimates that 90% of new supply over the next 40 years will come from developing countries. Thus, this competition for Africa's energy resources is a fight between great powers to control new energy. China is a major player in this competition as its energy needs and oil consumption have increased in the past decades. In response to this, the United States says African nation-states depending on Chinese debt and deals could free themselves through the loans given by the Britton Wood institutions (IMF and World Bank) and other Western powers including the United States itself.

Although the United States shows little concern about human rights abuses and crimes taking place in South Sudan, China, on the other hand, has its aid strictly adhered to the country's foreign policy (Hodzi, 2017, 4). China first showed interest in Sudan's oil industry in 1995, during Sudan's second civil war. U.S. economic sanctions laid on Sudan for war crime charges have not prevented Chinese companies from exploiting Sudan's oil reserves (Bodetti, 2019).

Playing the game of cards, the United States called on the government of Sudan to reach a resolution and sign a peace deal in 2011. The result stopped the war between North and South. Afterwards, the United States invested more than 1.9 billion dollars in the country since 2005; spending on reconstruction, humanitarian, development and the security sector (Jamie, 2017, 7). This level of U.S aid in sub-Saharan Africa is extraordinary and it marks one of the biggest United States foreign-based aid investments in the world. In this oil-energy competition, the U.S. was hoping to have control over South Sudan's

natural resources. The invasion of Sudan through the Darfur incident was considered successful (Rolandsen, 2015, 355-356).

China's trade relations with Sudan on the other hand is not limited to oil imports. China's commercial interests in Sudan are just one example of a larger story about China's trade involvement in Africa. While China needs an influx of resources to keep pace with its economic expansion, it also needs to identify new markets where it can export industrial products. The International Crisis Group said that China's foreign aid provides subsidies and other incentives for Chinese corporations to expand their businesses and, if necessary, export Chinese goods, technology and equipment globally (Caroline et al., 2012, 10). It is important to note that for every one dollar the Chinese government spend on a loan or investment in Africa, at least \$ 13 goes back to China as profit. In addition, Africa has many potential favourable markets for Chinese imports due to the high demand for products produced in China, e.g. low-priced electrical appliances. In 2008 alone, China became the third-largest trading partner in Africa, next to the United States and France.

There are few countries that consider South Sudan an ideal place for business. But unlike the United States and other strong economies, China's Foreign Policy is based on a non-interfering and risk-taking economic philosophy. There are favourable business opportunities in South Sudan for entrepreneurs who are courageous enough to venture into. Countries in East Africa alone have about 3 billion barrels in crude oil reserves. Petroleum specialist report that almost two-thirds of that amount is still unexplored. According to analysts, China holds the third-largest oil reserves in Africa, despite difficulties operating in war-torn regions. China's Africa success is based on its ability to avoid criticism from the international community, for disregarding human rights in countries they operate in. This tactic reinforces the Belt and Road Initiative which is aimed at expanding Chinese power in global North and South (Ladili, 2019, 10).

6. Problems Ahead

Observers globally have reported that the humanitarian assistance needed in South Sudan is enormous. Ironically, it has the fastest-growing population rate in the world. Under 30% of the population can read and write. The land is blessed with natural resources, yet highly underdeveloped. It is one of the countries that are completely dependent on oil for its national income. Existing oil reserves predictions indicate a decrease in production by

the year 2035. According to reports, the government has reportedly accumulated a huge sum of debt in military spending. While low global oil prices are putting more pressure on South Sudan's collapsing economy, extreme shortages of hard currencies have worsened food prices and food insecurity (BIP Inc., 2017, 159).

From a global perspective, South Sudan is not considered an independent country. It is seen by many as a mixed-ethnic group area with dominant tribes at the forefront. This is due to the way the peace agreement was processed so that a ceasefire could only be achieved if the ruling party was satisfied with its political position. Despite some signed peace agreements, weak systems still exist. Several agencies, such as the Joint Surveillance and Evaluation Committee (JMEC), UNMISS, IGAD, and Regional Conservation Forces (RPF), have enabled the implementation of several peace agreements. However, they were often unable to continue their mission due to institutional challenges that prevented them from functioning effectively. There is a lack of serious effort to stop the war. Even though the war brought a lot of negative consequences, government and elected politicians failed to show good intentions towards ending the crisis (Keitany, 2016, 50).

Those involved in the war have both political as well as moral responsibilities to protect the lives and dignity of the Sudanese people. But they failed. South Sudan has been betrayed by local and international stakeholders involved in peace negotiations. IGAD-backed peace agreement held in August 2018 shows that some countries involved in the process lacked neutrality. Sudan and Uganda represented the interests of both the government and the opposition, while Kenya and Ethiopia engaged in political and economic competition that benefited them in the peace process. Also, the national soldiers are more loyal to the political elite, especially those from major ethnic groups, than they are to the state. This relationship is strange but not something new. It have existed before the realization of independence (Rolandsen and Kindersley, 2017, 912).

Oil has been a curse rather than a blessing for most African countries (De Soysa, 2003, 409). It is believed to be the main instigator of war in South Sudan. The oil is produced in the South, but, processed, refined and exported from the North. The country earns its formal economy from oil production and the income generated from it (Agwaanda and Asal, 2020, 132). Oilfield management is synonymous with government revenue

management. Although the rebels failed to gain control of the oil fields, production fell from 250,000 barrels to about 160,000 barrels per day after the war in January 2015. It decreased by about 30% (Frontier Economics, 2015, 11).

Conclusion/ Recommendation

Civil war can be devastating. Although tribalism played a key role in this conflict, it is not the main trigger of political tensions. The crisis seems to have been triggered by the ruthless and selfish behaviour of politicians. South Sudanese leaders must be held accountable. Politicians should put aside their differences and focus on mending the communities. This can be done by introducing inter-regional projects that would help reignite trust among the locals. The South Sudanese civil service is in shambles. Thus, the government should establish initiatives to rebuild state administrative structures to help rebuild the country's service sector. With a robust civil service, a government can maximize its full potential to implement government programs, be effective in service delivery.

All parties involved in the domestic resolution of the war should make sure that the peace agreement includes indiscriminate accountability provisions. This includes the United Nations, African Union and major international partners. The new leadership in South Sudan has failed and is reluctant to shift into a democratic government. It is perceived as corrupt and uses divide and rule as a government method. Therefore, there is an urgent need for good leadership. Only then will the legacy of national injustice and prejudice be replaced with a state that ensures that all South Sudanese have equal rights and legitimacy. Also, civil society organizations should not only focus on receiving funding on behalf of the community, but also play a role in ensuring that the citizenship recognizes themselves as a whole and settle their differences.

Neighbouring African countries take up refugee responsibilities that are beyond their economic resource. This is because the regional groups ignore the fact that the protection of immigrants is a common global obligation and international cooperation is needed. Therefore, it is necessary to recognize that the division of responsibility is central to the international protection of refugees. Wealthier countries should share the responsibility of accepting migrants equally. The South Sudanese government is deeply involved in the war and commits human rights abuses, resulting in a large influx of refugees. This is why

they too must be part of the solution to eliminate the indigenous outflow. Greater participation from stakeholders is needed to prevent a return to violence that would lead to a new refugee crisis.

The path to truth, justice and reconciliation will provide an open space for dialogue for the South Sudanese. This would enable them to talk about their frustration and find solutions on how to achieve justice in a civilised manner. This platform will also address the country's existing structural weaknesses, by encouraging new government systems that are compatible with the country's social reality, as well as power-sharing agreements between warlords. The introduction of an equitable representation will eliminate the "winner and loser mind-set" that affects not only South Sudan but the majority of other African countries. When implemented, the new and perfect constitution with the help of UN forces should help reorganize and give the national security agencies new missions. With all these combined, there is a need for a comprehensive, impartial and honest peace process. A process that is unstained and unaffected by politicians. This will help reinforce the trust in the system by the masses. The masses have long suffered endless suffering. It's time to enjoy the beauty of peace and the general nutrition that accompanies food security.

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