

# Chasing a Mirage? Examining the South Sudan's Quest for Democracy and Sustainable Peace

Bir Serabın Peşinde misiniz? Güney Sudan'ın Demokrasi ve Sürdürülebilir Barış Arayışının İncelenmesi

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## ABSTRACT

South Sudan's quest for a democratic government and sustainable peace is increasingly becoming elusive, because of several challenges including lack of political will, arms embargo, the diminishing role of the regional and international community, inadequate resources to fund the implementation of the agreement, and the widespread insecurity in various parts of the country. The article notes that these challenges have remained constant since 2015, undermining the implementation of the Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan, the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan, and the newly extended roadmap ending in March 2025. The study concludes that unless South Sudan, probably with assistance of the regional and international community, sufficiently address the aforementioned challenges, a democratic governance remains a mirage.

**Keywords:** Chasing a mirage, Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity, South Sudan, South Sudan Peace Agreement

## Öz

Güney Sudan'ın demokratik bir hükümet ve sürdürülebilir barış arayışı, siyasi irade eksikliği, silah ambargosu ve bölgesel ve uluslararası toplumun azalan rolü, anlaşmanın uygulanmasını finanse etmek için yetersiz kaynaklar ve ülkenin çeşitli bölgelerinde yaygın güvensizlik gibi çeşitli zorluklar nedeniyle giderek zorlaşmaktadır. Makale, bu zorlukların 2015'ten bu yana sabit kaldığını ve Güney Sudan Cumhuriyeti'ndeki Çatışmanın Çözümüne İlişkin Anlaşma'nın (ARCSS), Güney Sudan Cumhuriyeti'ndeki Çatışmanın Çözümüne İlişkin Yeniden Canlandırılmış Anlaşma'nın (R-ARCSS) ve Mart 2025'te sona erecek olan yeni uzatılmış Yol Haritası'nın uygulanmasını baltaladığını belirtiyor. Çalışma, Güney Sudan'ın ve muhtemelen bölgesel ve uluslararası toplumun yardımıyla yukarıda bahsi geçen zorlukları yeterince ele almadığı sürece, demokratik bir yönetimin bir serap olarak kalacağı sonucuna varmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Bir serabın peşinde, Yeniden Canlandırılan Ulusal Birlik Geçiş Hükümeti, Güney Sudan, Güney Sudan Barış Anlaşması

## Introduction

The signing of the Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCSS) in August 2015 projected a ray of hope, warming the hearts of not only the people of South Sudan but the entire Horn of Africa region. There was hope that sustainable peace, security across the country, and democratic governance were forthcoming. However, within no time, things took a turn as the country could not make any progress in the implementation of the agreement, spiraling the situation out of control.

In what seemed to be downplaying pressure from the international community, the parties signed ARCSS, but with little commitment, and failed to take ownership throughout the implementation phase (Blackings, 2018). Consequently, the agreement could not hold as most of the provisions, apart

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from the formation of the Transitional Government of National Unity (TGoNU), were not implemented or seriously lagged behind schedule. Subsequently, a few days into the implementation of the agreement, the parties to the conflict violated the cease-fire, as was reported in numerous Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC) reports, signifying a commitment deficit.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout 2016 and 2017, conflict prevailed in most parts of South Sudan; a cease-fire was impossible, and the humanitarian situation continued deteriorating. During the period, the security situation was exacerbated by fighting that erupted in Unity State, Wau, Eastern Lakes State, several areas of Jonglei State, Western Bahr El-Ghazal, and Upper Nile State (JMEC Report, April 2017). The situation was further worsened by the rising incidences of cattle rustling among different communities in various parts of the country. In essence, there was war during the period in almost every part of South Sudan, including the Equatoria region, a place considered to be relatively peaceful (Mairi, 2018).

With the aforementioned developments, coupled with the ticking time, it was clear that ARCSS was collapsing. Therefore, the country and other stakeholders, including the international community had to resuscitate the peace agreement by renegotiating afresh. The new negotiation gave birth to the Revitalized ARCSS (R-ARCSS) that was signed in September 2018 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The R-ARCSS renewed hopes for the people of South Sudan after establishing a permanent cease-fire and promising democratic governance in 36 months (chapter 1 of the R-ARCSS, 2018). Comparably, the R-ARCSS has yielded better results as the cease-fire has largely been held and some provisions of the agreement have been implemented. However, the implementation of the agreement continues to miss critical milestones and deadlines, necessitating an extension of timelines by two years, up to the end of February 2025.

The extension of the agreement, in a detailed and itemized roadmap, was met with mixed reactions from various stakeholders. The hopefuls noted that it was the only way to prevent the country from sliding into war again. Pessimists, including the Troika and the European Union (EU), castigated the extension roadmap, arguing that the Revitalized TGoNU (R-TGoNU) was not serious in the implementation of the agreement. Nevertheless, the Revitalized JMEC (RJMEC) granted extension, and the roadmap has since taken off. The big question is, will the R-TGoNU manage to deliver a democratically elected government by the end of February 2025? This article attempts to analyze the challenges that led to the collapse of ARCSS and the extension of R-ARCSS and that may continue to undermine the implementation of the roadmap.

## Methods

This study employed both secondary and primary sources of information. For secondary sources of information, the study relied on periodic reports from lead institutions like the RJMEC and the United Nations (UN) and news from various digital and print media houses operating from within and without South Sudan. On the other hand, the study used a purposive sampling technique to reach the targeted respondents, who specifically are involved in the implementation of the South Sudanese peace agreement or work with the government.

Subsequently, the researcher—using unstructured questions—interviewed the respondents, extracting the necessary information to depict the challenges involved in the implementation of the peace agreements in South Sudan. Notably, the researcher strictly observed ethical considerations in regard to the safety of respondents by ensuring that they were kept anonymous, avoiding any leads that could unmask them. Throughout the article, names of the respondents have not been revealed. Instead, the researcher has tried to generally describe the respondents' profession, portraying their level of knowledge in the subject area, so as to benefit the readers and boost the credibility of the findings. Further, all the materials accessed from the secondary sources have been properly acknowledged by citing the authors within the text and in the bibliography. After the collection of the necessary information from both secondary and primary sources, the author carried out content analysis and collation. Later, the author presented the findings in prose.

## Challenges Surrounding South Sudan's Quest for Peace and Democratic Rule

South Sudan has and continues to face multifaceted challenges that are likely to undermine the country's quest for democracy and sustainable peace. This study found that resource inadequacy, widespread violence, power politics, arms embargo, and the diminishing role of the international community are key variables that have and could undermine the implementation of the peace agreement(s).

### Resource Inadequacy and Misappropriation

South Sudan is a third world country with an estimated 76% of its population in need of humanitarian assistance (World Bank Report, 2023). Largely, South Sudan depends on oil and gas resources, which account for at least 95% of its export income and contributes to approximately 40% of the country's gross domestic product (African Development Bank, 2020). Notably, the oil sector is the largest employer, followed by far by the low-paying agriculture and pastoralism.

During the implementation of the R-ARCSS, which coincided with the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic period 2020–2021, global crude oil prices fell significantly, affecting South Sudan's already dwindling economy (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2020). Notably, COVID-19 pandemic not only affected the global crude oil prices—which reduced South Sudan's revenue—but it also slowed down global economic activities as a result of restricted human movements or total lockdowns in various parts of the world. The lockdowns and restricted movement of people resulted in the disruption of the global supply chain of essential goods and services, further hurting the already dire economic situation in South Sudan. This was besides the increased expenditure on COVID-19-related supplies such as personal protective equipment, quarantine facilities, and testing kits, further taking away funds from the implementation of R-ARCSS.

<sup>1</sup> JMEC reports of 2017 inform that both the government and opposition forces violated the cease fire by exacerbating attacks in various parts of the country.

Paradoxically, South Sudan is accused of gross mismanagement of public resources as well as lack of prioritization in government spending (World Bank, 2020). In 2019, for instance, South Sudan was ranked the second most corrupt country in the world, beating only Somalia (Transparency International, 2020). The R-ARCSS has also clearly called on the government to build a legal and institutional framework to ensure transparent, accountable, and robust management of public resources in a bid to reduce the plundering (Chapter IV of R-ARCSS, 2018).

Noteworthy, the implementation of the R-ARCSS is an expensive venture; it provides for the formation of a government, several legal and accountability institutions as well as a unified force have to be put in place. This is why there are calls from all fronts— including the agreement itself, the EU, and the troika—that South Sudan must put in place legal and institutional frameworks to generate and prudently utilize revenue. Unfortunately, the lack of resources or the mismanagement of it thereof has significantly affected the implementation of the peace agreement as demonstrated hereafter.

The inadequacy of resources—for whatever reasons, including lack of proper revenue collection strategies, corruption, poor prioritization, or inadequate support from the international community—has continued to undermine the implementation of various parts of the two agreements (ARCSS and R-ARCSS) as well as the newly agreed extended roadmap. On the unification of forces, which is a very expensive venture, unavailability of funds has hampered the full realization of the spirit of the agreement. For instance, the unification process has suffered logistical, material, as well as technical progress due to the lack of resources. Cantonments including in Western Equatoria and Wau, for instance, faced acute shortages in food stuff, medicine, sanitary services, water, and dignity kits for the female recruits (RJMEC April report, 2020).

Resource inadequacy has also hampered the implementation of other parts of the agreement, including the agreement monitoring institutions. For instance, between February and April 2017 monitoring period, the Strategic Defense and Security Review Board did not meet to perform its mandate due to lack of resources. Further, during the same monitoring period, the Commission of Truth, Reconciliation, and Healing downed its tools due to, among other things, lack of funds to carry out its operations (JMEC quarterly report, April 2017). In March 2023, the National Constitution Amendment Committee (NCAC) suspended its operations, citing lack of facilitation by the government (Alex, 2023). The NCAC claimed that they had not been paid for over the last three years, casting doubts on South Sudan's democratic journey.

Sadly, South Sudan's financial woes seem to be undergoing a vicious cycle. According to a senior official working with the South Sudan Anti-Corruption Commission (interviewed on June 10, 2023 in Juba), the existing accountability institutions are struggling to perform their mandates due to inadequate funding. The respondent expressed pessimism that institutions such as South Sudan Anti-Corruption Commission (SSACC) remain ineffective because they are not properly funded. This sentiment therefore dims hopes of South Sudan attracting assistance from the international community—such as Troika and EU—who are categorical that South Sudan must establish a robust public resource management system before they resume their financial support (Mamer, 2022).

### **Widespread Violence and Insecurity**

The pervasive conflict and insecurity in South Sudan, in violation of the cease-fire agreements, continue to undermine the country's democratic journey and quest for peace and stability. All the local peace monitoring institutions and international organizations, including the UN, agree that South Sudan has witnessed widespread insecurity in most parts of the country. First, the implementation of ARCSS was seriously undermined by the deteriorating security situation in the country. As JMEC report (April, 2017) indicates, South Sudan experienced violence in most parts of the country, worsening the already dire economic and humanitarian situation.

The deteriorating security and the violation of the cease-fire agreement in the country remain the key reasons for the collapse of the ARCSS, necessitating its revitalization in 2018. As soon as the ARCSS was signed, both parties started violating the cease-fire, slowing the implementation of the deal. By July 2016, at the time South Sudan was celebrating its fifth independence anniversary, war had engulfed the country, demanding the evacuation of Riek Machar for the second time (Mairi, 2018). Violence had spread from the volatile areas to relatively peaceful regions including Equatoria (Mairi, 2018). The tragic evacuation of Riek Machar, coupled with the widespread violence in almost every corner of the country, completely watered down the possibility of continuing with the agreement. Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan had largely collapsed, calling for its revitalization in a new negotiation.

The signing of the Revitalized Agreement in 2018 in Juba renewed hopes as a new and permanent cease-fire arrangement was agreed. Nevertheless, violence has continued manifesting in many parts of the country, threatening the implementation of several provisions of the agreement. Revitalized Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC) report of April 2020 informed that South Sudan, despite an active cease-fire agreement, experienced widespread conflict and violence. More specifically, communal clashes, cattle theft, destruction of property, and massive violations of human rights manifested in Abyei, Greater Bahr el-Ghazal, Equatoria, Jonglei, Unity, Upper Nile, and Lakes (RJMEC report 2020 April). Further, on March 20, 2020, Luo Nuer, Dinka Bor, and Murle tribes got engulfed in an intercommunal conflict (United Nations News, 2020).

Moreover, from October to December 2022, RJMEC reported that a cease-fire was generally held in South Sudan. However, the Sudan People Liberation Movement—in Opposition (SPLM-IO) splinter groups, the Agwelek and Kitgwang factions, clashed in Jonglei and Upper Nile, fueling fear in the regions. Further, RJMEC's report of December 2022 informed that in Upper Nile, Nuer tribe youth fought with the Agwelek forces and clashed with the Shilluk tribe in Upper Nile.

## Power Politics and Inadequate Political Will Among Elites

This article credits power politics and inadequate political will, among the signatories to the agreement, as one of the key impediments to the implementation of the peace agreements in South Sudan. From the onset of ARCSS through R-ARCSS to the newly agreed extension, political maneuvers between the parties to the agreement have manifested, with the intention to outdo one another and gain more political prowess. Afriyie et al. (2020) allude that while the South Sudanese leaders remain the central players in resolving the crisis in the country, they have chosen to put their personal interests—to cling to power—at the expense of the interests of the population and the nation. According to Mairi (2018), South Sudanese leaders did not enter into the agreement to achieve stability in the country; they signed the peace deal to continue enjoying the trappings of power. Provided the political elites have secured power, their urge to make progress in the implementation of the peace agreement dwindles. With this argument, the hopes of stabilizing the country and delivering a democratic outfit become a mirage.

For President Salva Kiir, for instance, his interest in the agreements was to weaken the opposition, and he has managed it. This is evident in how he managed to dislodge the SPLM-IO, scattering them out of Juba into confusion. Salva Kiir also managed to expel Riek Machar into exile in July 2016, replacing him with Taban Gai, an SPLM-IO member who was viewed as a sympathizer of the government. The expulsion of Riek Machar into exile marked the collapse of the ARCSS, a fact that the government downplayed, claiming the implementation of the agreement was on course. The aforementioned developments ultimately led to the collapse of ARCSS, paving the way for its revitalization in a new negotiated deal in 2018 in Khartoum.

There were indicators depicting inadequate political will, and the international community ought to have noticed, manifested when there was no ceremonial handshake in the signing of the peace agreement in 2015. Notably, Riek Machar signed the agreement on August 18, 2015, in Addis Ababa, while President Salva Kiir signed it on August 26, 2015, in Juba, but with reservations in several sections. The signing of the agreement on different days and venues was because the two principals could not see each other eye to eye. The tension between the two principals casted doubts on the implementation of the peace agreement, a process that required honest and frequent consultation. Other glaring indicators that the signatories were not willing to work together and establish a stable country include the time taken to reach a deal; negotiations started in December 2013 and lasted until August 2015. However, no sooner had the parties in conflict signed ARCSS than they immediately violated the cease-fire agreement, plunging the country into perpetual violence and conflict.

Second, after the signing of the peace agreement in August 2015, President Salva Kiir intentionally delayed to make the requisite security arrangements to have Riek Machar come to Juba (an opposition member of the National Assembly of South Sudan informed in an interview on June 1, 2023). The delays took Riek Machar at least 8 months before reporting to the country and taking up his position, as the first vice president, as provided in the peace agreement. This delayed the formation of the government and implementation of key provisions in the peace agreement, requiring the two principles to be together. As Mairi (2018) observes, the signatories signed the ARCSS as a result of pressure from the international community and local population, not on their own commitment. The noncommitment of the signatories was reflected in how the agreement was implemented, completely collapsing even before it could take off.

When the ARCSS could not progress, as dismal milestones were achieved, a new negotiation was opened that saw the signing of R-ARCSS in 2018. After the signing of R-ARCSS, the principals continued their power struggles and outsmarting one another in a bid to acquire or retain power, undermining the implementation of the agreement. The parties to the agreement continued breeding mistrust and disunity between themselves, seriously jeopardizing the implementation of the agreement. One case in many, on May 8, 2020, President Kiir unilaterally allocated regional states to political parties, giving one state to South Sudan Opposition Alliance, three states to SPLM-IO, and six SPLM-IO. President Kiir's move did not go down well with the opposition, who claimed that the allocation did not consider party prominence within respective regional states (Clayton, 2020).

Further, on March 3, 2023, President Salva Kiir, in a presidential decree, unilaterally fired three of his cabinet ministers, including Agelina Teny, the defense minister and wife of Riek Machar. Notably, the defense ministry position, according to the revitalized agreement, is allocated to SPLM-IO, and therefore, President Kiir has no business interfering. Consequently, on March 4, 2023, Riek Machar condemned and rejected Salva Kiir's pronouncement, calling on him to immediately withdraw the decree and reinstate Angelina Tenin in the defense ministry (Joly, 2023). The Kiir's decree was in violation of Article 1.12.1 of the agreement, requiring the parties to the agreement to agree on the allocation of ministerial positions (R-ARCSS, 2018). The removal of Angelina Teny as the minister of defense received criticism from agreement stakeholders, including RJMEC, warning that it is likely to revert the gains made in the implementation of the agreement (The Star, 2023).

Importantly, there is consensus among the observers and stakeholders in the peace agreement that there is a lack of political will in South Sudan. Notably, the Troika and the EU in August 2022 issued a statement castigating the extension of the agreement by two years, claiming that the principals of the agreement and the government did not take the necessary actions that would have fostered implementation. Further, on August 4, 2022, the Troika and EU refused to attend the launch of the extension roadmap, citing a lack of inclusivity in the extension process. Apparently, there seems to have been a dismal will by the government of South Sudan to involve the civil society, despite efforts from the international community to have them included in the extension process.

## Arms Embargo and the Diminishing Role of the International Community

South Sudan is currently under an arms embargo that was imposed under the UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2428 of 2018, which has been annually renewed in several resolutions. Lately, on May 30, 2023, the UNSC, under resolution 2683, renewed South Sudan's embargo up to May 2024 (Xinhua, 2023). Notably, the UNSC imposed and reviewed the arms embargo in South Sudan based on the

following benchmarks: formation of a unified force; progress on demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) of forces; a program on the management of the existing arms and ammunitions; and the implementation of the joint action plan for the armed forces.

The voting at the Security Council has been a very contentious affair as some members feel that the embargo is undermining the implementation of the crucial parts of the agreement, especially the Chapter II of R-ARCSS, detailing the necessary unification of forces (NUF). The UNSC 2023 vote was a controversial one as some countries, including China and African states, abstained, claiming the extension of the embargo does not serve the interests of South Sudan people (Jonathan, 2023). The arms embargo controversy was also surrounded by the Panel of Experts' allegations that South Sudan had breached the existing sanctions by acquiring armored personnel carriers (Jonathan, 2023). On the other hand, some UNSC members have been voting for the renewal of the embargo, arguing that South Sudan has made no significant progress in addressing the benchmarks.

Factually, South Sudan is yet to achieve most of the benchmarks set by the UNSC over the arms embargo. As informed by a senior military officer interviewed on July 12, 2023, there is barely no program for the management of the existing weapons in the country; no progress on DDR; no progress on the joint action plans; and some little progress on the NUF. Thus, if South Sudan is allowed to acquire arms without significantly achieving the aforementioned benchmarks, the country is likely to be ungovernable, with arms getting their way into the hands of civilians.

On the flip side, South Sudan direly needs to acquire modern weapons, more sophisticated than those in the hands of the civilians, to be able to protect the population. The government needs APCs, for instance, to be able to deploy troops in far-flanked, hostile, and ungoverned areas and protect the population. As noted by a respondent working as a senior officer at the South Sudan People Defense Forces, interviewed on May 30, 2023 in Nairobi, the civilians are in possession of weapons that are more modern and sophisticated than the government security agencies. This makes it difficult for the government to counter rebels and protect the population (Xinhuanet, 2021).

In a bid to lift the arms embargo, South Sudan has campaigned and solicited support from various countries and institutions, like the EU, claiming it has delayed the unification of forces (Xinhuanet, 2021). In April 2022, the government registered about 78,300 forces in various training centers, barracks, and cantonments awaiting vetting and screening before they could embark on training and later deployment (Clayton, 2020). However, as shown in the photo below, the forces were unable to train well or even get deployed due to lack of arms. The photo shows graduates passing out with sticks instead of guns in a ceremonial parade. The image should encourage the international community to take necessary steps in assisting South Sudan to overcome the security challenges.



**Figure 1.**  
*Image of NUF troops in a pass out parade. Source: The Star, August 30, 2022*

On the other hand, the diminishing role of the international community in South Sudan continues to thwart the implementation of the peace agreements. The silence, inadequate supervision of the parties to the agreement and dismal financial support continue to undermine the South Sudan's democratic journey. According to Mairi (2018), the reluctance of Troika and Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to hold parties to the agreement accountable is one of the reasons for the collapse of ARCSS; the parties acted with impunity and violated every provision of the agreement.

During the extension of timelines of the R-ARCSS, in an agreed roadmap between the parties in August 2022, a section of the international community, including the Troika and the EU, expressed dissatisfaction, claiming the postponement of the agreement by two years resulted from a lack of commitment of the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (RTGoNU) (Statement of the Troika and EU member states, 2022). Further, the Troika and the EU vowed not to fund the roadmap until the RTGoNU demonstrates prudent generation and utilization of public resources. Subsequently, Rick Machar, the South Sudanese First Vice President, pleaded with the international community to fund the roadmap, arguing South Sudan lacks resources to fund the process (Mamer, 2022). In the event the international community fails to fund the roadmap, which includes conducting a census, voter registration, and deployment of the unified forces, South Sudan is most likely to postpone the agreement again.

Further, on July 15, 2022, the United States of America government withdrew funding of the two peace monitoring bodies in South Sudan, the RJMEC and the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring Mechanism, citing limited involvement of the RTGoNU in the peace process (Kelly, 2022). Additionally, the US informed that they cut funding of the two monitoring bodies because South Sudan lacked sustained progress in the implementation of the peace agreement (Voice of America, 2022).

### **Non-Signatories' Dilemma**

During the signing of the 2018 agreement, some armed parties did not sign the agreement, claiming it did not address the root causes of the problems in South Sudan. The non-signatories to the agreement, also known as the hold-out groups, continue to undermine South Sudan's quest for stability and democracy as they are not part of the commitment to peace or cease-fire. Notably, five major armed groups that declined to sign the agreement are: South Sudan United Front/Army headed by General Paul Malong Awan; United Democratic Revolutionary Movement/Army led by Thomas Tut Doap; National Democratic Movement Patriotic Front of Emmanuel Ajawin; National Salvation Front (NAS), steered by General Thomas Cirillo; South Sudan National Movement for Change led by Alex Yatta Lukadi; and the Real SPLM of General Pagan Amum Okiech.

The hold-out group, united under the umbrella of the National Non-Signatory South Sudan Group, has had several negotiations with the government under the auspices of IGAD, Troika, and the Sant Egidio community with little success. In February 2020, the Sant Egidio community managed to commit the hold-out group to a cease-fire agreement and resumed talks with the government (Reliefweb, 2020). However, talks have registered no milestone as the government continues to blame the hold-out groups of perpetrating violence in violation of the cease-fire agreement and undermining the implementation of the peace agreement. Consequently, on November 24, 2022, the government of South Sudan, in a letter to the Sant'Egidio, withdrew from the talks, claiming that the hold-out groups were not committed to peace and stability of the country.

Meanwhile, the government of South Sudan continues to accuse hold-out groups of killing people in various parts of the country. In July 2021, the NAS of Thomas Cirillo was accused of attacking truck drivers heading to Juba from Uganda through the Nimule-Juba highway (Crisis24, 2021). The attacks on the truck drivers disrupted transportation of imports, causing the skyrocketing of the prices of basic commodities in Juba. South Sudan would be safer, in terms of making sensible strides towards democracy and sustainable peace, if all parties were included in the agreement. This way, the country would be able to have all the parties, including the hold-out groups, committed to the cease-fire agreement and inclusively moving the country forward.

### **Prospects of the Roadmap**

In August 2022, the South Sudan parties to the agreement agreed on an extension of the R-ARCSS deadline, owing to several missed crucial milestones in its implementation. The extension of the agreement implementation period, in a roadmap, was met with mixed reactions, with criticism and praise in almost equal measure. Critics, including Troika and the EU, expressed pessimism that the government is unlikely to deliver democratic governance within the added two-year period unless they improve public finance governance and forge for all-inclusiveness, roping in civil society in the implementation process. On the other hand, optimists observed that the new roadmap was the only way to avoid the collapse of the peace agreement, preventing an outbreak of violence in the country.

There are conspicuous milestones that the government of South Sudan must achieve to realize a democratic government and the prolonged transitional period by March 2025. Some of the important milestones that must be achieved include enacting the requisite constitutional reforms, generating a clean voter register, delimiting constituencies, carrying out a national census, and improving the security situation across the country. If RGoTU does not achieve the milestones in time, then South Sudan is likely chasing a mirage—a democratic dispensation remains elusive. This article, in this section, tries to evaluate the possibility of South Sudan achieving the aforementioned milestones and project whether the roadmap will bear fruit or will lead to another, maybe, revitalized roadmap.

Generating a voter register in the post-conflict dispensation in South Sudan remains one of the most challenging assignments (Nic et al. 2023). This is because many South Sudanese lack documentation due to the prevailing dysfunctional governance coupled with protracted conflict and insecurity in the country, resulting in massive displacement of population (Nic et al., 2023). The weak government in the country could not establish systems for tracking citizens, making it difficult to know how many there are and where they are located. As informed by a South Sudanese diplomat interviewed on July 28, 2023, after the war in Sudan that erupted in April 2023, approximately two million South Sudanese had returned home by the end of August 2023, increasing the population density of the Sudan–South Sudan border areas. The situation is further exacerbated by the lack of an updated voter register, undermining the delimitation of constituencies, an exercise that is largely dependent on population statistics.

As it is in many African countries, the delimitation of legislative constituencies and the registration of voters is a very emotive phenomenon, as it is relied upon for resource distribution and allocation of political seats. Therefore, it is recommended that a national census precedes the delimitation exercise in order to avert tension that may occur, especially in South Sudan where mistrust is the order of the day. Notably, despite the movement of citizens in the South Sudan, census has not been updated in the country since independence (Nic et al., 2023). For an election to be held, census must be conducted, followed by delimitation of constituencies, then registration of voters, in that order. Notably, a regular census, going by experience of other countries, can be conducted—from planning, civic awareness, execution, analysis, and report production—in at least one period, before delimitation of constituencies and voter registration. In Kenya, for instance, census results are released in six months while a detailed analytical report takes one year to be released (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). This leaves South Sudan in a precarious situation given the remaining 16 months, from now until August 2023, to conduct a census, delimit constituencies, register voters, and conduct a free, fair, and transparent election.

The aforementioned pending activities will take a miracle for South Sudan to complete and hold elections in December 2024, dampening hopes of delivering a democratic government.

Additionally, the prevailing security situation in South Sudan is unlikely to allow for election preparation activities, including voter registration, delivery of electoral materials, and actual voting, tallying, and announcement of results. Currently, the government of South Sudan has demonstrated an inability to manage violence due to several intervening factors such as lack of funds, un-deployed NUF, as well as the existing arms embargo in the country. Should the existing security situation continue, which is highly likely because the government is doing little about it, voters are unlikely to turn up to vote as the administration cannot assure them of their safety. Alternatively, if South Sudan insists on holding elections, the exercise is likely to be somewhat successful in areas such as Juba, where the government has relative control. However, holding elections in this manner is a double-edged sword as the elected regime may face legitimacy questions.

Further, the delayed constitutional making process dampens hopes of South Sudan delivering a democratically elected government in early 2025. According to the revitalized agreement Chapter VI, Art 4, South Sudan is supposed to enact a new constitution before the next election. The entire process of making a new constitution—from writing, public participation, and promulgation—is resource-intensive and time consuming. The process is likely to take approximately one year, minimizing the chances of South Sudan holding an election by the end of 2024. Noteworthy, according to the resolutions of the 30<sup>th</sup> RJMEC meeting (2023), the process of making a permanent constitution lacks meaningful progress, 17 months into the election.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The challenges that have undermined the implementation of all the agreements (ARCSS, R-ARCSS, and the roadmap) in South Sudan, including lack of political will, inadequate resources, an arms embargo and the diminishing role of the international community, and the widespread insecurity in the country, remain relatively the same. There is pessimism that South Sudan will deliver a democratic government by 2025 unless the country effectively addresses the aforementioned bottlenecks. The challenges have left the country unable to meet critical milestones necessary for the holding of elections in December 2024. Particularly, it will take a miracle for South Sudan to conduct a credible, transparent, and peaceful election in December 2024 as there are still many activities that are yet to be done before then. The country is yet to enact a permanent constitution, conduct a national census, delimit constituencies, and update its voter register. All these activities, which are crucial for a credible and peaceful election, may each take more than a year to be conducted and cannot be run concurrently; meaning it is impractical for South Sudan to hold elections within the remaining timeline.

On the other hand, if South Sudan, in a bid to yield to pressure from the regional and international community, insists on holding elections in December 2024, the process is highly likely to be shambolic, with polling only conducted in few areas and the outcome could be an illegitimate government. This will mean that the country will go to the polls without an updated population census, delimited constituencies, a clean voter register, and a permanent constitution that establishes and gives mandate to the electoral commission. South Sudan holding elections in the absence of these milestones exposes the country to tension which may spiral into conflict, engulfing the country in civil war again. For South Sudan to come out of these challenges and increase its chances of delivering democratic governance as well as guarantee sustainable peace, the following measures should be taken:

- i. South Sudan should reinvigorate its economy by employing multifaceted strategies, including but not limited to diversifying its economy – to lower dependency on crude oil; establishing a robust legal and institutional framework to improve economic governance and enhance transparency and accountability. This way, the country may attract foreign investment and may encourage the resumption of financial assistance from the international community, who withdrew support citing corruption and lack of accountability in South Sudan. Further, a rejuvenated economy will allow South Sudan to fund its democratic journey, reducing reliance on the elusive international community support.
- ii. RTGoNU endeavors to bring on board the hold-out groups to be part of the agreement. This will ensure that South Sudan moves forward together, as a country, toward a democratic governance. The hold-out groups, who are not signatories to the agreement, are not bound or committed to the agreement and have been instigating violence as they are not part of the cease-fire deal.
- iii. The international community should consider lifting the arms embargo so as to enable South Sudan to acquire modern and sophisticated arms and equipment than those in possession of the civilian militias. This will enable the government to deploy the recently graduated unified forces and subdue the belligerents, improving the security situation in the country,
- iv. The South Sudan parties to the agreement, especially President Salva Kiir and Riek Machar, the main opposition leader, should endeavor to invest in confidence building measures so as to bridge the trust deficit between themselves that has been characterized by a lack of political will, seriously undermining the implementation of the peace agreement.

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**Hakem Değerlendirmesi:** Dış bağımsız.

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