



## Transcript

# Sudan and South Sudan: The Importance of Interdependence

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5 March 2014

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## **SUDAN AND SOUTH SUDAN: THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERDEPENDENCE**

### **Paul Murphy:**

Good evening, everybody, and a very warm welcome to Chatham House. This evening we have just a short hour together to capture a lot of rich and interesting things. We're going to have James Copnall, who has put together a very interesting compendium of recent and further history in a book, *The Poisonous Thorn in our Hearts* – copies are available on the side here. We're going to ask James this evening to give us a little bit of a sense of what he has learned and what he has put together through the exercise of capturing important insights, in terms of the histories of Sudan and South Sudan, but particularly looking at how they both come together and how they should be understood together.

James has been the BBC correspondent in the region for a number of years. Before he came to the Horn of Africa and dealt with Sudan and South Sudan, he had an active time in West Africa. He is currently engaged in the region in various different forms.

To help us with our reflections on James' work this evening, we have one of our elders here from Sudan and South Sudan, Dr Douglas Johnson, who is probably familiar to many of you: a scholar who has looked at various aspects of Sudan and South Sudan's history over the years, but also been involved in a lot of the important junctures of the peace process over the last 10 or 15 years, especially around the issues of boundaries and Abyei, etc.

So the plan for this evening is we will ask James to give us some insights that he has gathered through the compilation of his book. We will follow that up with Dr Douglas, who will give us a perspective on what James will share with us. Then we will have a chance to have some questions from the floor. Because time is short, I suggest we go straight into our agenda. We'll ask James to lead us in some reflections from your work. Welcome.

### **James Copnall:**

Thank you very much. Thank you very much to Chatham House too. It's very nice to see so many friendly faces in the audience.

The book is essentially an account of Sudan and South Sudan after separation in 2011. Actually, there were some pretty extraordinary things that happened in that period, starting of course with separation itself but also new

conflicts in South Kordofan and Blue Nile, inter-ethnic clashes. A shutdown of the oil industry, in which a government voluntarily chose to give up 98 per cent of its own income. Direct fighting between Sudan and South Sudan, and of course the tragic events happening now in South Sudan. It's incredibly rich material, as it were, though very depressing in some cases.

The Sudan and South Sudan we know now, in some aspects, could be considered a fairly unlikely marriage. I won't go through all the reasons that brought them together and tore them apart, because I think probably people here will have a fairly good grasp of that. But I do think it's important to say that those decades of conflict and underdevelopment and other things do have an impact on the Sudan and South Sudan of today.

For Sudan in particular, separation created two major problems. The first was economic, because three-quarters of the daily oil production was in South Sudan. That meant the Sudanese economy took a real hit. It had really neglected other areas of its economy, so this was a particularly difficult blow. It had to remove fuel subsidies, partially and then fully, and that led to people on the streets, protests, unrest, along with other consequences. The second major problem was conflicts in South Kordofan and Blue Nile that had been frozen by the 2005 comprehensive peace agreement heated up again, just before and just after separation. These were added, of course, to the ongoing conflict in Darfur, which began in 2003 by most accounts (although fighting had been going on even before that). Things got harder for Khartoum with the creation of the Sudan Revolutionary Front, a coalition group of rebel movements, in November 2011.

These conflicts, new and old, are in part due to Khartoum's failure to manage diversity. It's a very diverse country, Sudan, even after the separation of South Sudan. So one of the things I tried to do in the book was give the experience of ordinary people in quite different situations. So you take Mustafa, who's a businessman in Khartoum – pretty prosperous, drives a nice car. Doesn't particularly like the NCP (National Congress Party) or dislike them, but he's able to accommodate with them. Then Hawa, who grew up in Darfur, got no education, few prospects. She works as a tea lady. Her only objective is to get to the end of her life and meet God, is how she put it. These kind of differences between opportunities exist in every country, but they're particularly stark and pronounced in Sudan. Sudan hasn't done a good job, not just under Omar al-Bashir but for decades, in managing that sort of diversity.

But after separation in particular, because of the challenges I outlined above, all Khartoum's political energy, all its financial resources, went into fighting off these rebellions and into regime survival. The NCP – the party trying to do this – is a sort of unwieldy coalition of Islamists, pragmatists, security factions, military. Often that means it's very difficult to tell which faction has the upper hand at any one particular time. This leads sometimes to paralysis or confusion in its decision-making.

One key example of this was the July 28, 2011 deal in South Kordofan. It was meant to be a cessation of hostilities in the South Kordofan conflict, which was about six weeks old at that point. It was signed by Nafi Ali Nafi for the NCP. It would have had rebel fighters brought back into the national army, it would have allowed SPLM-North (Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North) to exist as a political party. It was rejected by President Bashir – torn up essentially – just a few days later. There are different theories as to why that happened. One is a secession clash between Nafi Ali Nafi and Ali Osman Taha. Another could be that the military felt that they could overcome the rebels without the need for this sort of deal. But essentially, that clash within the NCP, or within those in control under President Bashir, was one of the defining factors of the period after separation. In recent times, you've seen the military gaining the upper hand. You see that by Bakri Hassan Saleh being named as first vice-president and Ali Osman Taha and [indiscernible] being pushed aside.

But after a quarter of a century in power, the NCP is in an increasingly difficult position. Economically struggling, no longer able to pay for patronage in the way it could in the past. The rather brutal crackdown on protesters in Khartoum and elsewhere in 2013. Economic demonstrations that ended with more than 200 dead, to believe hospital sources and human rights groups, cost the NCP some of its legitimacy in its core constituency at the heart of the state too. So the NCP, I think, realizes what a difficult situation it's in and that's why there is this talk of national dialogue, talk of reform. President Bashir made a big speech about it. Apparently it was met with quite a lot of disappointment by those who attended.

There's a growing international consensus too, I think, that Sudan's problems can't be solved with piecemeal agreements. If you sign a deal on South Kordofan, that doesn't help you in Darfur. It doesn't deal with the fundamental issues of governance at the heart of the state. But this is something that has not been accepted by the NCP, so they talk to one politician but not another; they want to negotiate with the Darfuri rebels in one forum and SPLM-North in

another. There's a sense, possibly, that divide and rule tactics are being used when genuine reform is what is required.

If I turn to South Sudan: in January 2011, the vote on unity or separation, nearly 99 per cent of southern Sudanese voted to go their own way, voted for separation. But that was just a mirage of unity. It was what the southern Sudanese wanted, but I think there probably wasn't as much common ground behind that as one would have hoped or the south Sudanese would have wanted.

They also were in many cases unprepared, the rebels who led the country to independence, for governance. So Luka Byong of the SPLM talks about the liberation curse, the sense that those qualities required for an effective rebel movement and effective fighting force are not ones best suited to the consensual mode of governing, of democratic governing that can bring a country to increased development and stability. The first couple of years after separation, corruption was a huge problem. Resources were concentrated in Juba rather than around the country, despite promises in the past. There is a general lack of development too. In all this, there were echoes of the old Sudan, the kind of system that the Southern Sudanese had fought to break away from – a sense that in some cases they were replicating that system at home in their new country.

In those first couple of years after separation, before this latest crisis, there were three main threats to stability in South Sudan. The first were the ongoing tensions with Sudan on the border, and I'll come to that a little bit later. The second was inter-ethnic clashes. The third was a growing political rivalry within the governing SPLM party.

That inter-ethnic tension or clashes were most violently and dramatically expressed in Jonglei state, in which in some days hundreds of people were killed, and certainly thousands were killed over a two or three-year period in revenge attacks – sometimes over cattle. Ethnic tensions played a part; so did a lack of jobs, lack of development. A lack of security too – the military or the police were simply not able to get to difficult areas in time because the roads weren't good enough. There was also – and this is another worrying sign for the new country – a sense of impunity, that if you carried out a crime, a murder maybe in a cattle raid, you would never face court. You would never face trial. Therefore, the cycle continued, or in some cases got worse.

The current events, which obviously everyone will be aware of – civil war splitting the country – grew out of political tensions. This, I think, is one of the problems of the system in South Sudan, where all legitimacy, all power,

resides in the SPLM. Being in opposition, you have a limited space to operate and no real chance of getting into power. So any conflict within the SPLM, which is a small space, has national repercussions. In South Sudan, being in the SPLM and being in power in the SPLM is everything if you're a politician.

So this current fighting – estimates say more than 10,000 people killed. I think, frankly, no one knows, but clearly huge numbers of people being killed. Nearly a million displaced or refugees in foreign countries. Ethnic tensions have been exacerbated, development halted. Old wounds have been reopened. One small, individual case that stuck with me was a man called David who I interviewed in Khartoum around the time of the referendum, a southern Sudanese. He was planning to go back to the new country, to live in an independent South Sudan. A few months later, in late 2011, I saw him in Juba. He hadn't found a job, was a bit frustrated with the pace of change, but he was still happy to be free, delighted that he had a country to call his own. Then around the time of this latest fighting, I found him by chance in a camp in the outskirts of a UN base in Juba, where he'd fled for his life. So many people's lives have been altered by this very depressing trajectory that South Sudan appears to be on.

There are talks going on in Addis between the warring parties, with some involvement of other politicians too. There may well be some sort of carve-up based on a military balance of the moment. There are talks too to resolve the tensions within the SPLM. But all those in themselves, I think, will not be enough to cure the majority of South Sudan's problems. It needs a broader involvement in talks – civil society, youth groups, women's groups and so on. A genuine programme of national reconciliation, something to bring communities back together again. I think there was a huge emphasis in South Sudan from the 2005 CPA (Comprehensive Peace Agreement), and again from independence in 2011, on state-building – on building the institutions. That's needed, very needed, but there wasn't enough emphasis on nation-building. I think without that, South Sudan faces quite a bleak future.

All this rather depressing train of events have led some people to question whether South Sudan should have become independent. That's not a position I share at all. I think South Sudanese, despite what has happened in the last few weeks and months, are still very happy to be free, still very happy to have their own country. But the challenge now is to build a harmonious future for that country.

Turning to the relationship between the Sudans, it's a fairly obvious point but I think it's worth stressing that separation did not end the ties between the two

countries – ethnic ties, political ties, trade ties. I came across a man called Dr Garang Thomas Dell, a Southern Sudanese man, son of a general. He'd studied to become a doctor in Khartoum. He fell in love with a northern Sudanese and he courted her for ten years – they were happy, they were in love, but the family wouldn't accept that a northern Sudanese marry a Southern Sudanese man. Eventually, two or three years before the split, her family agreed and they got married. They had a big wedding in Khartoum and they had a couple children. But then separation happened and Dr Garang ended up in South Sudan and his wife and two children are in Khartoum. They need a visa to be able to see each other. His example is not typical, but it does show the continuing ties, the continuing links between the two countries.

As Dr Garang and his wife found out in the period immediately after separation, the relationship between Sudan and South Sudan was a very bad one indeed. This was the 'bitter and incomplete divorce' of the subtitle of the book. Both Sudans gave some measure of support to rebel groups in the other country. To give one example, Bapiny Monytuel of the SSLA (South Sudan Liberation Army) was nominally, on paper, based in Mayom County, Unity State, but actually if you wanted to see him you went to [indiscernible], which is in the south of Khartoum. He had a large house there. There was a Hummer, there was a Land Cruiser. He had armed guards outside, all from his Bul Nuer subgroup. Likewise, the support went in both ways, one of the ways in which both countries undermined each other after separation.

Not just rebels too – there were bitter negotiations about oil, about debt, about the disputed borders. At the point when separation happened, there was no agreement on the complete borderline. Something like 20 per cent of the border was estimated to be still in dispute or claimed by one side or the other. We are lucky to have someone who's done extensive research on the border here as well, so he may be able to talk more about that.

But there was a hope at separation that the shared, mutual interdependence of the economy could bind these two countries together, that a deal on oil – South Sudan would export its oil through Sudan's pipelines, export terminal, refineries, and that both countries would benefit financially from this deal and this could stick the two countries together. In the first year or so after separation, that didn't happen. In January 2012 there was the oil shutdown I mentioned earlier. Essentially you had an economic war between Sudan and South Sudan, both leaderships hoping the other in the other state would collapse under the economic pressure. In April 2012 there was direct conflict on the border, in an oilfield area that the Sudanese call Heglig and the South

Sudanese Panthou – administered by Sudan, claimed by South Sudan. This was the lowest point: the armies of Sudan and South Sudan, helped in both cases by rebel movements, fighting each other on the disputed border, destroying oil facilities at a time when both economies and both sets of people were suffering from the lack of oil money.

But from that low point in April 2012, actually there has been improvements in the relationship between the two, and a demonstration too of what that sort of improvement can mean. Under UN pressure, threat of sanctions, deals were signed in Addis Ababa in September – the September agreements. Nine deals in total, including on oil, so oil production eventually was able to restart. On trade, on a demilitarized buffer zone. It wasn't a complete agreement; there weren't deals on the border, or agreement on the border, and on the disputed border region of Abyei. Even six months later, following the Sudanese rebel attack on Abu Karshola, which Khartoum believed was supported by Juba, President Bashir threatened to shut down the pipelines once again. That threat was averted by August of last year.

But essentially, the September agreements set up an environment in which both Sudan and South Sudan realized the mutual benefits they could gain. They realized that they weren't able to bring down the opposite political leadership and that there could be some mutual benefits from allowing the oil to flow and calming things down on their respective border regions. That led, in another little concrete step of progress, to many South Sudanese rebel groups – including Bapiny Monytuel – signing an amnesty with the South Sudanese government, a tangible sign of what sort of benefits a better relationship could bring.

The South Sudanese crisis was the latest test of all this. President Bashir came to Juba and he supported Salva Kiir, a sign that this improved relationship had made a difference and fundamentally changed the potential balance of events in South Sudan at that point. But there are still a couple of potential problems. Firstly, that could change quickly. Khartoum is annoyed about the Ugandan military presence in South Sudan. It's also annoyed about what it sees as Sudanese rebels JEM fighting in South Sudan, getting weapons, getting fuel, and then going back into Sudan to fight there. There are also potential tensions over the border in Abyei. We've seen clashes in Abyei in the last few days, a sign too that there is a way in which this improved relationship could change around pretty quickly, were it to suit the interests of both sides.



Just to conclude, very briefly, this improved relationship did bring about benefits to both Sudan and South Sudan. But ultimately I think it brought more benefits to the elite. This was a deal between the elites. Oil revenue hasn't really helped the people of South Sudan much. It hasn't helped the people of Sudan that much either. What is more important and what hasn't really happened is increased trade and a better relationship along the border. Sometimes people, away from their state governments, have been able to create that better relationship along the border. So a deal between the elites is not in itself enough to resolve the problems.

I think, to conclude, the better that Juba and Khartoum get on, the better it is for the peoples of both Sudans, with that caveat that I just mentioned. But for both Sudans to truly know peace, there needs to be a fundamental change in which both countries govern. Thank you very much.

### **Paul Murphy:**

I think it's a real achievement that – I think James has managed to reflect a lot of the history and background to Sudan and South Sudan faithfully but very succinctly, and then bring us to contemporary events. In fact, in some respects, it's almost like a real-time account of what is happening in South Sudan and Sudan, which is a big achievement for something that's published and available to so many people.

We're also very lucky this evening, before we have a chance for opening up our discussion, to get a perspective from somebody who looks at these events from a more historic view, and trying to interpret some of the issues that we're still grappling with, in terms of the challenges and the fallout from the political failures that James has mentioned, and to try and put that into a longer-term perspective. I'm pleased to invite Dr Douglas Johnson to offer some perspectives from his view.

### **Douglas Johnson:**

Thank you very much. The recent fighting in South Sudan has opened up a small feud between academics and journalists. So I'm going to try something different. I'm going to try to talk about where we have a common interest, which is trying to understand and analyse what is happening.

The day before South Sudan's independence, a journalist came to me in Juba and said to me: from what everybody has been telling me, independence has come too soon. I asked him: have you talked to any South Sudanese? And he

said no. I'm glad to say that's not a problem with this book. James does bring out a number of different voices, of Sudanese and South Sudanese, many of which, though they are people unknown to me, are recognizably people of the sorts of real lives that are lived in both countries.

James has touched on a couple of things that are very important and I would just like to talk, first, about the issue of nation-building in South Sudan. This is something that has been coming up very recently as a result of the fallout in Juba between Riek Mashar and Salva Kiir, and the reigniting of a massive feud or civil war within the SPLA. One of the things that I think has been overlooked about the issue of nation-building is that South Sudanese throughout the 22 years of civil war, and even during the six years of the interim period, they were not all living in cattle camps or in villages in remote, deep rural areas. Many of them have had the experience, in refugee camps abroad or in the shantytowns around the three towns, of living with other South Sudanese from different communities. They have brought that back and they are bringing that back.

Now, it is quite true that there is a real problem of ethnic tension. Nobody can deny that. But it is not the case so far that South Sudanese are killing each other. It is not the case that civilians, by and large, are being mobilized against their neighbours. In fact, one of the sorts of reports that came out of Juba only belatedly was after the killing had started, with men in uniform targeting specific neighbourhoods and specific persons, reports were coming out of neighbours protecting neighbours, and even neighbours combining to protect their neighbourhoods. So this is something we have to bear in mind, that there is a process of nation-building that has been going on within South Sudanese communities, even if we have not been seeing it among the elites.

It is something where I think the current political climate in South Sudan, it probably does perhaps give us an opportunity for more civilian voices to be raised, and more civilian voices to be mobilized, in coming to a resolution between these different power blocs and different groups. We have seen it already in organizations like the South Sudan Law Society or a think tank like the Sudd Institute, or even also some of the more thoughtful analyses and proposals that have been coming out of the South Sudanese diaspora. If that can be channelled into the current negotiations and talks, then that will be a positive development.

Turning to the two countries, it is of course quite true that even during the civil war, and even during both civil wars, even when governments were trying to mobilize a civilian population around the idea of jihad, you did not necessarily

have all northern Sudanese ranged against all southern Sudanese. They were obviously in the three towns – the shanties would be bulldozed, the churches destroyed, but this was the action of government rather than of civilians. If you look at the issues around the border, as James was alluding to, there are common issues that have to be resolved that are quite independent of the issues that have to be resolved between Juba and Khartoum.

One of the interesting developments around northern Bahr el Ghazal and Abyei is that if you look at the reaction of the [indiscernible] and Misiriya to recent events – I'm not talking about the fighting and the shooting that has just gone on recently but to the issues of livelihood, of grazing, etc. – the Misiriya did not have a unified reaction, for instance, to the Ngok Dinka referendum (that was a unilateral referendum). The Misiriya themselves do not all graze in the Abyei area. They have interests outside of Abyei. They have interests in northern Bahr el Ghazal, they have interests in Unity. These interests are things that are negotiated not necessarily between the representatives of the state but are negotiated with their neighbours on the other side of the border. So that is certainly something that is going to be a factor in the resolution of the relations between the two states, as well as the relations between the peoples on both sides of the border.

I know this is beginning to sound a little bit naively optimistic. I recall something that a South Sudanese journalist, Jacob Akol, recently wrote, referring to his visits to Rwanda and Burundi as a journalist and as an NGO worker, and talking about having observed 'how people can get jolly along', he said, for quite a long time – until politicians, out of greed, power-hungry or whatever, fracture those community ties. We've seen that, for instance, in places like Bosnia. And also, shall we say, in Northern Ireland and Ireland. Community relations, personal relations, can be quite tolerant and quite tolerable until they are fractured by the insertion of political or military objectives by people from outside – not necessarily people outside the community but by the leaders of that community.

Of course, this does have an impact. People will not just go back to what they were before the civil war. They will not go back to just what they were before the fighting began between the Murle and the Lou Nuer in Jonglei. That of course itself was a legacy of the war, and the fact that Jonglei was a prime recruiting ground for different militias, both pro- and anti-government, throughout the period of the civil war. That was one of the things that kept the fighting going there. People will not go back in Juba to the way they were, just like that. This will take a great effort.

I do not believe, for instance, that the border will be resolved until there are changes – and substantial changes – in the national governments of both states. The border itself is not the problem. It is the disagreement between the governments that is the problem. How those changes will come about, we all wait with baited breath to see.

**Paul Murphy:**

Thank you very much. We're all struggling with the difficulties of the present and the challenges that Sudan is facing, the very palpable challenges in South Sudan at the moment. But I think contributions like the work that James is sharing with us and the perspectives that Douglas is offering – we have to keep checking ourselves so that we overcome stereotypes, so we try to look at a situation honestly and try to think as clearly as possible. To look at events that are current and sometimes difficult emotionally to deal with, but to look at them over time – look at where things have come from the past. But also to look at what is really a story of a journey, and there's a future to that journey. These are dark times but it doesn't mean that that's how that journey will end. I think for those of us who have had the privilege of living in Sudan and South Sudan over the years and know the character of the many rich and diverse cultural backgrounds, and the people which make that up – which I think, as Douglas has mentioned, is a great strength in the way you have captured this particular story, by making some people very visible and accessible – is to me a reminder of the fact that despite the gloomy challenges we have at the moment, there is a great capacity to overcome adversity and find an eventual, peaceful way forward.