



Sudan's Hidden Agenda Toward South Sudan Emerging as Khartoum Plays the Rôle of Mediator Between President Salva Kiir and Riek Machar

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Executive Summary

- * The fratricidal fighting in north-eastern South Sudan keeps escalating, with no end in sight.
- * The IGAD-sponsored peace process is going nowhere because it focuses on attaining national-level political solution even though the actual fighting is led by local commanders in pursuit of localized self-interests.
- * Khartoum is exploiting the diplomatic paralysis and fear of escalation of the conflict in order to become a leading mediator. The role of Khartoum is now accepted by both the key South Sudanese protagonists and the international community – especially Beijing.
- * However, the minutes of top secret strategy formulation deliberations by Sudan's top military and intelligence officials in summer 2014 prove that there exists a major question regarding the sincerity and real intentions of both Riek Machar as an interlocutor and of Khartoum as a mediator.
- * The true objective of Khartoum is to reunify Sudan by reabsorbing South Sudan – which contradicts the mediator's self-ascribed goal to help an independent South Sudan return to peaceful normalcy. Sudan is providing military and intelligence support for rebel forces in South Sudan in return for sensitive intelligence data provided by the Machar camp.
- * Just how the policies and objectives asserted by the national security and intelligence élite of Sudan can be reconciled with Sudan's declared rôle as a mediator between Machar and Kiir is yet to be comprehended.



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ANALYSIS

The fratricidal fighting in north-eastern South Sudan keeps escalating, with no end in sight.

Even though the actual fighting is led by local commanders in pursuit of localized self-interests, there have been repeated efforts to negotiate a political solution. The political efforts are conducted mainly through the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and aim to negotiate an end to the fighting through a power-sharing deal between the President of South Sudan, Salva Kiir, and his former Vice-President turned rebel leader Riek Machar.

Kiir and Machar are expected to attend yet another round of IGAD-sponsored meeting on Sunday, January 18, 2015. This will be, senior African diplomats predict, "a decisive round of talks".

The latest round of negotiations started in Khartoum on January 12, 2015, with the People's Republic of China (PRC) as a mediating power. The PRC has major economic, mainly energy, interests in both Sudan and South Sudan, interests which are adversely affected by the fighting. Hence, Beijing is attempting to exert pressure on both sides to finally reach an agreement and cease the hostilities. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and the Ethiopian top diplomat, Tedros Adhanom, joined Sudanese Foreign Minister Ali Karti in a renewed effort to stop the hostilities.

Wang Yi warned that the negotiations over South Sudan had reached a most sensitive milestone by early January 2015. "Thanks to the IGAD efforts and courageous step of the parties, the solution moves forwards, and any setback at this stage would collapse the process," he warned. Wang Yi noted that the growing instability in South Sudan is adversely affecting regional stability and economy. "This is what the international community does not want to see happening, and we are in China as friends also do not like to see this happening." Tedros Adhanom opined that Khartoum conference was "an important milestone" made possible by Beijing's rôle as "a reliable friend and vital partner to the African continent and the Republic of South Sudan, which is facing challenges". Ali Karti announced that both sides once again agreed to "immediately work to stop hostilities" and also to "speed up the pace of negotiations to form a transitional government".

The rôle of Khartoum as a leading mediator was accepted by South Sudanese Foreign Minister Barnaba Marial Benjamin during his visit to Khartoum at the turn of the year. On January 2, 2015, he credited Khartoum with achieving progress in the negotiations with Riek Machar. "There is big progress in the talks with the armed opposition. We reached an agreement on some bones of contention and we will reach a peace deal soon with the support of the [IGAD] and friendly nations," Benjamin said.

Talking in Khartoum to Ahmed Younis of the *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, Benjamin elaborated on the recent developments. "I can say with confidence that significant progress has been made in the negotiations. President Salva Kiir has met with Riek Machar at length, for eight hours, and agreed to form a transitional government, with a prime minister without executive powers. South Sudan is a presidential republic whose president is elected by the people. Therefore, they agreed to form a government consisting of the president, the vice-president, prime minister and three deputy prime ministers. We also agreed to unify the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) within three months and include those who rebelled against it into its ranks as well as help elements from the White Army – an irregular force loyal to Machar – to return to their villages."



Meanwhile, Machar appointed top military generals to “reorganize, command and control” their own forces in anticipation for an escalation in the fighting against President Kiir’s Government forces. Machar also announced the redivision of South Sudan into 21 federal states and the creation of several new counties, thus challenging the validity and legitimacy of the South Sudanese state authorities. Machar also created state-like institutions and nominated individuals to assume key rôles in government in the aftermath of a power-sharing agreement of the kind mediated by IGAD.

However, there exists a major question regarding the sincerity and real intentions of both Riek Machar as an interlocutor and of Khartoum as a mediator.

Back in Summer 2014, Sudan President al-Bashir instructed the entire national security and intelligence élite of Sudan to re-examine the country’s overall defense posture in view of the prevailing and emerging threats and opportunities. On August 31, 2014, the entire leadership met at the National Defense College in Khartoum for a top secret strategy formulation deliberation. The attendees covered all issues affecting Sudan including, and in great detail, the real policy toward South Sudan. They also addressed the agreements and understanding between Riek Machar and the Government of President Omar al-Bashir. The minutes of the Joint Military and Security Committee Meeting held at the National Defense College provide a unique insight into Khartoum’s real analysis and policies regarding South Sudan (and many other issues).

The meeting was structured with the discussion going around the table and each senior official – from the lowest rank to the seniormost position – surveying the activities and analysis of his office on all pertinent issues. [The quotations below come from the excellent translation of the minutes of that meeting provided by Prof. Eric Reeves.]

All participants started from the premise that the South Sudanese threat to Sudan was comprised from two distinct aspects. On the national-doctrinal level, there remains the unacceptable and intolerable decision (from Khartoum’s standpoint) by the South Sudanese to break Sudan and form their own state. Khartoum remains committed to the reunification of Sudan irrespective of the world’s recognition of South Sudan. On the practical level, Khartoum considers Juba responsible for the enduring rebellions in the southern parts of Sudan: The Nuba Mountains, Blue Nile, and Darfur. Hence, Sudan believes that the destabilization of South Sudan to the point of collapse is both imperative for preventing the support for the insurgencies inside Sudan and a revenge for Juba’s transgressions.

General Siddiq Amer, the Director General of Intelligence and Security, emphasized the gravity of the South Sudanese threat. “The South is still supporting the rebels with the aim to overthrow our government and change all of Sudan. In order to counter that danger, we are employing a plan to infiltrate and empty the refugee camps, recruit field commanders and train the locals in the affected areas to fight and defeat the rebellion.” To counter the threat, Sudanese intelligence is penetrating and subverting the rebel forces and leadership, is increasing the JEM *jihadi*st forces and their operations inside south Sudan, and, increasingly, actively supporting Riek Machar and his forces.

General Imad al-Din Adawy, the Chief of Joint Operations, elaborated on Khartoum’s analysis of the threat South Sudan constituted. “The greatest threat to us is from South Sudan. They are refusing to agree on drawing the Zero Line. We suggested the formation of joint forces along the border line, but they refused that too. They are still supporting the two divisions of Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile.” Adawy explained that the only viable response to this threat is close cooperation with, and support for, Machar in his effort to bring down the Kiir



Administration in Juba. "Accordingly, we must provide Reik's forces with great support in order to wage the war against Juba and clean the whole of Greater Upper Nile area."

Adawy highlighted the intelligence cooperation he already received from Machar and Taban Deng Gai, the former Governor of Unity State, South Sudan, who joined the Machar camp. "During their visit to Khartoum, Reik and Taaban reported to us everything about the logistical support from Juba to the rebels, the route of supply and who transports it to them. They also gave us information about the meetings held between Juba and the rebels in regards to the disengagement, the support Salva Kiir gives to the two divisions and his intentions towards us in Khartoum; also the presence of the Americans and the Israelis in Juba and the support they provide, in addition to Musevini's support of the SRF, and Kampala hosting the majority of the rebel leaders, also the arrangement made between Juba and Kampala to transport rebel leaders to Uganda after the signing of the joint cooperation agreement between them. Now we have the necessary information which will enable us to take the right decision against the South and Uganda, and to deal with the movements that are collaborating with them," Adawy explained.

Major General Hashim Abdalla Muhammad, the Chief of Joint General Staff, concurred and argued that Khartoum must do more to help Machar. "We must create a balance of forces in South Sudan. Reik, Taaban and Dhieu Mathok came and requested support in the areas of M.I. [Military Intelligence] and training specially in operating tanks and artillery. They also requested armament. They want to be given advanced weapons. Our reply was that we have no objection, provided that we agree on a common objective. For sure we will benefit from their discourse. Taaban apologized for the support he rendered to Darfurian movements and the rôle he played in Higlig battle. He explained that the Dinka used them in that battle to spoil their relation with the North. But they lately discovered their mistake. Now they are fighting to achieve a federal system or autonomy for each region. I think any autonomy for the Greater Upper Nile is good for us in terms of border security, oil resources and trade. Now people are studying how to have well-trained and equipped forces with advanced M.I. and logistic support."

Major General Mohammed Atta, the Director General of NISS [The National Intelligence and Security Services], pointed out to the help provided to Machar by his organization. "We agreed with Taaban to establish an efficient Intelligence and Security system to cover all their offices and the requirements of the field. This system will work under our supervision and we shall analyze and process the information for them. The running cost of their offices is my personal responsibility beside the NISS. We pledged to provide them with full protection and security, since we were instructed by the President since Dr. Reik's visit to Khartoum."

General Abd al-Rahim Muhammad Hussein, the Minister of Defense, returned to the threat that South Sudan constituted to the stability of Sudan in view of the ongoing insurrection in two southern regions. "The problem of the two areas [the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile] is connected to the implementation of the Joint Cooperation Agreement with Juba to define the Zero Line and the observation mechanism. In addition to opening the 'buffer zone' and the border trade crossing points. If the South accepted, the rebels will succumb and will agree to negotiate the issues of the two areas only. I agreed with [the AU's Thabo Mvuyelwa] Mbeki that he will go to the South to meet Salva Kiir in order to set a date for the meeting of the political and security committee under the AUHIP." The ensuing negotiations between Khartoum and Juba have failed to deliver the results sought by Khartoum.

Ultimately, Hussein argued, there was no alternative to subverting South Sudan, establishing a pro-Khartoum regime in Juba, and working toward the reincorporation of South Sudan in a unified Sudan. He was convinced



that Khartoum could and should work with Machar toward these ends. "The people of South Sudan must accept to meet us and tell us their opinion on the drawing of the zero line and the buffer zone. If they refused we can deal with them in a manner that suits the threat they pose to us. I met Reik, Dhieu and Taaban and they are regretting the decision to separate the South. We decided to return his house to him. He requested our assistance for he has shortage in the MI personnel, operations command and tank technicians. We must use the many cards we have against the South in order to teach them a lesson they will never forget."

Major General Hashim Osman Al-Hussein, the Director General of Police, wondered whether the intervention in the internal affairs of South Sudan was worth the effort since, in his opinion, South Sudan was collapsing on its own. "What business do we have with the South? Let them solve their own problems and again, the problem of South Sudan is not one that can be solved," he opined. Prof. Ibrahim Ghandur, the Deputy Chairman of the National Congress Party, provided the authoritative reply. "We are interested in a relationship with the South that is free from treachery. Salva Kiir has always deceived us, but we showed patience despite our knowledge of every detail. We wanted him to stop his support to the rebels and hand over the borders to us, but he always looked for excuses. So, we remain with no choice, but to liberate our land from the control of the rebels."

Major General Bakri Hassan Salih, the First Vice President, was also worried by the aggregate impact of the threat from Juba. "The greatest security and social threat [to Sudan] comes from South Sudan, for two reasons: First, the foreign existence which represents a direct threat for us (Uganda, America, France and Israel), and the Armed Movements [operating southern Sudan]; and secondly, the refugees and those displaced due to war, diseases, and social crimes (the Sudanese refugees in the camps of the two areas, children missing education, spread of diseases and converting to Christianity)." Under such circumstances there is no prospect for genuine normalization of relations between Khartoum and Juba, Salih stated. "We are not interested in any relationship with South Sudan or the neighboring countries, but reality requires us to adapt with the new circumstances. Dr. Reik paid me a visit on August 11, 2014. He could not believe what happened in the South. He said the Dinka exterminated his tribe. He requested assistance in all respects. We also have our own agenda." Therefore, Salih concluded, President al-Bashir instructed that Khartoum would provide comprehensive support for Machar.

Just how the policies and objectives asserted by the national security and intelligence élite of Sudan can be reconciled with Sudan's declared rôle as a mediator between Machar and Kiir is yet to be comprehended.

Remarks: Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.

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