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Peacekeeping in a difficult neighbourhood: the case of South Sudan

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Version: Published Version

Monograph:

Wondemagegnehu, Dawit Yohannes (2018) Peacekeeping in a difficult neighbourhood: the case of South Sudan. . Conflict Research Programme, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK.

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CONFLICT
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Conflict Research Programme

Peacekeeping in a difficult neighbourhood: The case of South Sudan

Dawit Yohannes Wondemagegnehu



About the Conflict Research Programme

The Conflict Research Programme is a four-year research programme managed by the Conflict and Civil Society Research Unit at the LSE and funded by the UK Department for International Development.

Our goal is to understand and analyse the nature of contemporary conflict and to identify international interventions that 'work' in the sense of reducing violence or contributing more broadly to the security of individuals and communities who experience conflict.

Introduction

“There have been frustrations on the part of the AU [African Union] and the international community with the slow pace of tackling this issue [addressing the issue of peace in South Sudan]. They made a correct decision to place the responsibility for dealing with the conflict on IGAD [Intergovernmental Authority on Development]. That is because if you do not have the region involved then you will not have a successful peace process. But this region is made up of countries with quite separate national interests. This is part of the difficulty the region faces in intervening as one unified actor.”

Nicholas Haysom, UN Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan¹

The above quote succinctly captures a well-known conundrum on the role of regional actors for peace in their immediate geographic neighborhood. More often than not, regional actors project the international community with a paradoxical choice of being unavoidable actors for peace and that of spoilers. Recent global and regional peace making and peacekeeping endeavors are rife with illustrations of this conundrum. The conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo in the 1990s is an apt illustration of how the interest of countries in the region played out not just in exacerbating the conflict but increasingly in convoluting successive efforts for peace. More recently, South Sudan’s tragic experience bore out the tension between the respective national interests of neighbors and collective policy actions and decisions at sub-regional, regional, and global platforms for peace. Evidently, the interests and threats considerations of countries in the region were at logger heads with each other in some instances, with the ultimate consequence of

impacting the quest for peace in the country. Without mentioning names, UNSG Antonio Guterres lately alluded to this challenge by stating that “recent experience has illustrated that regional interests and proximity to the parties can also complicate conflict prevention and resolution efforts”. (UNSC, 2018, § 54).

Against this broad background, this research report focuses on the issue of neighborhood peacekeeping interventions, specifically examining the impact of neighboring countries’ interests and intervention on peacekeeping operations in South Sudan. The central question this paper engages with is how and why do countries intervene in a neighbor, in this particular case in South Sudan and, following the outbreak of the 2013 crisis, how did their interventions impact the peacekeeping mission in the country?

Within the existing academic and policy literature, the peacekeeping roles of countries neighboring conflict zones has assumed varied dimensions. In the UN peacekeeping policy discourse, the prevailing view had been that of reluctance to the participation of neighboring countries in UN peacekeeping missions. In this regard, Paul Williams and Thong Gguyen (2018, p.1) stated the prevalence of “unwritten principle that UN peacekeeping missions should seek to avoid deployment of troops or police from ‘neighbors’ in order to mitigate the risks associated with these countries’ national interests in the host countries”. From a normative dimension, this general attitude stems from *neighbors’* difficulty to maintain the principle of impartiality in their conduct in host countries as the former presumably may have their own national interests. As one of the core UN peacekeeping tenets, impartiality refers to the expectation that peacekeepers should be unbiased and indiscriminating towards conflict parties.

¹ Institute for Security Studies (ISS). PSC Interview: Nicholas Haysom, UN Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan. 16 August 2018. Available on https://issafrica.org/pscreport/addis-insights/psc-interview-nicholas-haysom-un-special-envoy-for-sudan-and-south-sudan?utm_source=BenchmarkEmail&utm_campaign=PSC_Report&utm_medium=email.

Nevertheless, this long-standing view appears to have been challenged by and increasingly re-examined due to a number of factors. Chief among them is the changing global peace and security dynamics which necessitated the emergence and the ascendance in the relevance of regional peacekeeping missions, especially in Africa. Peacekeeping missions such as AMISOM and AFISMA/MINUSMA attested to the inevitability and relative significance of troop and police contributions from countries neighboring crisis zones. Within these missions, troops from the neighboring countries operate in terrains that they are familiar with and they increasingly proved to be more committed to take more risk including heavy casualties. Further, these troops were often strategically deployed or positioned to prevent the spillover effects of the conflict to the home country, thereby serving key national interest considerations.

At the same time, the growing roles of neighbors in peacekeeping by itself had generated its own debates. In the case of the UN, the debate focused, for example, on whether or not the UN should “increase the number of peacekeepers drawn from countries neighboring the host state” (Williams & Nguyen, 2018, p.1).

The flip side/converse of this debate touches upon how the disparate interventions of neighboring countries in conflicts in their vicinity affect ongoing peacekeeping missions in those specific contexts.

This study examines this puzzle based on both fieldwork and desk review of pertinent literature focusing on Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan and Uganda. To this broad end, the study accomplished two major objectives: analyzing patterns in the regional interests in South Sudan before and during South Sudan crisis and subsequently examining the impact of divergent regional

interests on the peacekeeping mission.² Based on its findings, the study furthers the following set of arguments.

Alignment of regional interests in South Sudan took a different turn following the outbreak of the 2013 South Sudan crisis. Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda which were hitherto historically united by shared support to southern independence had failed to realign their respective national interest considerations with that of a collective quest for peace in South Sudan. The divergence of regional interests in South Sudan is mainly due to the overt partisan positions of Uganda and to a lesser extent Sudan in the 2013 civil war. Contending interests of these two countries in the South Sudan conflict defined the positions of the conflict parties both in the course of the conflict and later during the regional mediation process. Divergence of regional interests in South Sudan had a direct consequence of prolonging the resolution of South Sudan civil war. Parties to the conflict leveraged lack of common regional position to reject or delay implementation of provisions of major peace agreement(s). Its specific impact on peacekeeping include weakening the overall function of the mission(s) to the extent that peace missions are conceived to be ultimately operating towards an overarching political goal (which took quite some time to establish in the case of South Sudan). Interest-based engagements and involvement in South Sudan also impacted the timeline of deployment and troop composition of the peacekeeping mission, especially the Regional Protection Force (RPF) in South Sudan. One clear consequence is the exclusion of some of the neighboring countries analyzed in this study (Uganda and Sudan) and consequently in watering down the political will and appetite

² This report covered the peacekeeping and peacemaking dynamics in South Sudan up to mid 2018 and doesn't reflect the developments that unfolded afterwards.

to deploy the RPF. The RPF was deployed when the idea behind its authorization had significantly lost its momentum. These observations point to the need to find ways of 'early enough' constructive engagement of neighbors in creative and contextually rooted peacekeeping policies. Among other things, these policies shall balance on the one hand the self-interests of countries in the neighborhood and the collective regional quest for peace in a given context on the other hand.

In terms of the structure of this report, part one offers a brief background analysis as well as conflict dynamics of South Sudan. This part focuses mainly on the historical analysis of the engagement of selected frontline countries in South Sudan and their motivation to do so, especially in the period immediately predating the establishment of the country as an independent entity. This analysis helps us to foreground the discussion on subsequent intervention of South Sudan's neighbors during and in the aftermath of the 2013 civil war.

Part two examines the modes of interventions and the underlying threat analysis and other national interest-based considerations of each neighbor following the outbreak of the South Sudan conflict. Part three is dedicated to analyzing the impact of neighbors' intervention and interest on peacekeeping missions in South Sudan. To this end, this part will examine if and how neighbors' interventions affected the objective of peacekeeping missions in South Sudan. It will also shed light on ways of constructively transforming the potential adverse impacts of the unavoidable intervention of key front-line states.

Part One

Against the backdrop of years of deep-rooted political wrangling and party in-fighting, gun fights erupted in Juba in December 2013 between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and the then Vice President Riek Machar. The government claimed it was thwarting an attempted *coup* that was in the making under the brinkmanship of Riek Machar. The fighting was followed by ethnic based attacks and counter-attacks, including on civilians in different parts of the country. Increasingly, the fighting spread to different parts of South Sudan and at one point the country's territory was divided between government and rebel forces. Political wrangling including the detention of high-level officials accompanied the military confrontations. All of these constitute what is considered in this study as the South Sudan civil war.

At its core, the South Sudan civil war is considered a deep political and security crisis with a very strong ethnic undertone. Citing commentators such as John Prendergast, Alex de Waal (2015, p.91) attributed the outbreak of the crisis, though to a lesser extent, "to political and personal rivalries, ethnic animosity between the Dinka and the Nuer tribes of the two major protagonists (of Salva Kiir and Riek Machar, respectively), and the internecine wars among South Sudanese factions in the 1990s". While valuing these factors as real, de Waal credited a higher significance to causation of the crisis to what he calls the "elemental contest over buying loyalties".³ On its part, the AU Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan (2014, p.20) point to failure of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) as a root cause of the crisis stating that "the current conflict can be

³ This refers to existing trend in South Sudan as well as in the Horn of Africa region in which governance operate on exchange of personal transaction of political services and allegiances for material reward (de Waal, 2015).

attributed, in part, to the flaws of the CPA (in terms of process and outcomes) as well as its implementation.”

The above suggests that as most other contemporary crises, South Sudan’s civil war is indeed complex, multi-causal, pluri-actor, and dynamically evolving. It also suggests that it is a crisis that is both historically rooted as well as driven by and grounded in contemporary realities of the country. While South Sudanese ‘agency’ is a key driver of the conflict, regional actors and responses have significantly shaped South Sudan’s still-evolving civil war. This forces us to note how national and regional interests have intertwined and increasingly complicated regional and even trans-regional interventions and responses to the crisis.

As the South Sudan crisis lingered, countries in the region were constantly looking for ways that safeguard their respective strategic interests. Increasingly, it became very evident that competing regional interests had exacerbated the crisis, adding to its complexity (Kuol, 2018). It appears self-interest of neighbors had prevailed over pursuit of collective goals in South Sudan. However, this sharply contrasts with the role some of South Sudan’s neighbors had played historically in supporting the self-determination pursuit of southern-based groups and in enabling the establishment of the country as an independent nation. This section and the coming one will chronicle these competing stories.

Neighbors’ interests, motivations, and interventions in South Sudan: Early 1990’s and up to 2013

In the lead up to the 2011 South Sudan referendum, the Norwegian Peace Research of Oslo (PRIO) conducted an analysis of the interests and motivation of some of the countries in the region. The analysis concluded that the neighboring countries have a clear interest in contributing towards a peaceful

transition in the Sudan (Høigilt, Falch & Rolandsen, 2010). PRIO’s analysis seems to be echoing an earlier conclusion done by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) in 2008 which stated of a shared interest in “creating peace” within IGAD as a regional bloc. The latter attributed IGAD’s desire for peace in Sudan as driven by a transversal set of factors. These factors included maintaining regional security, preventing spillover effects into neighboring nations, developing the economy in order to expand trading relationships, and developing internal national resources to stimulate economic growth, refugee and humanitarian, assistance in order to bring an end to the devastation caused by the civil war (Schafer, 2007). These analyses are correct to large extent but apply only to Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda, albeit some nuances. They are correct in the sense of expressing a shared end state among the key IGAD member states (i.e. to see peace in Sudan) as well as in capturing their drivers or motivations therein. Importantly, these three countries all had a demonstrable leaning towards supporting the south’s quest for self-determination, though each country prioritized certain prerogatives over others to justify its strategic inclination. In contrast, Sudan had a diametrically opposite interest *vis-à-vis* the others emanating from its desire to prevent the impending secession of the South and to exert its influence in its immediate neighborhood. The ensuing sections provide a country-by-country analysis of the interests, motivations, and modes of engagement of these countries.

1.1. Uganda

Uganda had a deep and multifaceted historical engagement with the South. In the context of the long-standing civil war in Sudan, Uganda had maintained consistent but unequivocal stance on the issue of the South. As such, it was rightly considered as “one of

the SPLA's most ardent supporters during the war" (International Crisis Group, 2010, p.5) and later as the most unambiguous supporter of independence. Uganda had historically matched its professed support for the South with diverse forms of practical engagements covering diplomacy, military, and other dimensions. In the 1980's, Uganda provided diplomatic support in lobbying around ground realities in the South as well as offered clandestine military support to SPLM. The latter gave way to open financial and military assistance as well as direct involvement in operations alongside the SPLA, whose fighters moved back and forth across the border and were allowed both an operating base and a political platform in Uganda (ICG, 2010b).

With the signing of the CPA and the establishment of the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS), Uganda continued its strategic engagement with the South through institutional and military capacity building, including training of civil servants in the Southern Sudan (Høigilt, Falch & Rolandsen, 2010). According to Høigilt, Falch and Rolandsen (2010), Uganda's expanding engagement in Southern Sudan was driven by two major considerations: one emanating from Kampala's security-based threat analysis and the other from socio-political and economic interests.

In the late 1980s and 1990s various rebel groups that used to operate in different parts of the country made up Uganda's major security concerns. While groups such as the West Nile Bank Front and the Allied Democratic Forces were militarily challenging the Ugandan government, the LRA was arguably the most prominent one projecting a major threat to Uganda. Undeniably, LRA was receiving strong military support and assistance from Sudan, presumably in retaliation to Uganda's continued support to the SPLA. With the tacit knowledge and support from Khartoum, the LRA used to operate from military bases located in the current territories of South Sudan. As the

prospects of an independent state loomed larger, Uganda saw in South Sudan the prospect of a friendly country which could serve as a buffer effectively blocking the LRA threat. The SPLA had tried to live up to Uganda's expectation in that regard. The nascent GoSS established following the CPA was involved in peacemaking efforts between Uganda and the LRA. Importantly, the GoSS also allowed Ugandan soldiers to operate in its territory hunting the LRA as early as 2008 and itself dedicated four brigades to cooperate in the LRA hunt.⁴ These security-based considerations were emblematic of an existing trend of the time in which relations among countries in the region were marked by deep-seated suspicion, rivalry and strategies of mutual destabilization. As a key feature of this trend, countries in the region were involved in proxy wars against each other, mainly through arming and harboring of rebel groups.

Linked with its security interest, certain political considerations foregrounded the uneasy relationship between Khartoum and Kampala that marks the early 1990s. In part, an extension of the security predicaments discussed above, the two countries were harboring deep-seated mistrust against each other (Høigilt, Falch & Rolandsen, 2010). For Kampala, the increasing influence of political Islamism in Khartoum and Sudan's attempt to project the same southward was rather unsettling. This was largely perceived as a move to spread Islamization and even Arabization in the region. Khartoum, on its part, was not happy with Uganda's all-rounded support to the rebellion in its southern region.

⁴ The GoSS contribution to these campaigns include the SPLA's Second Division, elements of the 9th Brigade (Eastern Equatoria), the 7th Brigade (Central Equatoria), the 8th Brigade (Western Equatoria); and from the 5th Division, including the 43rd Brigade (Western Bahr El Ghazal). The SPLA has also armed local defence units ("arrow-boys") to assist in repelling the LRA in Western Equatoria. Its engagement is largely oriented toward civilian protection, not pursuit. See International Crisis Group Africa Report N°157, *LRA: A Regional Strategy beyond Killing Kony*, 28 April 2010.

Further, Uganda's close ties with the political and military elites of the South did not bode well with Khartoum. As a net effect of these and other factors, the two countries had severed their diplomatic relations in mid-1990s and despite a degree of rapprochement since, their relationship had remained comparatively weak as late as 2010 (ICG, 2010a).

Kampala's relation with what was to become South Sudan was also shaped by social and cultural links between the Sudan's southern territory and Uganda. As many post-colonial countries, ethnic communities straddle the border and it was not uncommon to find Acholis, Kakwas, Langos, Madis, and others in both countries (ICG, 2010b). These shared ethnic forms of kinship were further buttressed by other societal interactions, notably by history of hosting each other's refugees. According to ICG (2010b), Uganda had been hosting many refugees from the South who were fleeing from the civil wars. Ugandans had also sought sanctuary in the South, especially after the fall of Idi Amin and during recurrent bouts of conflict between government forces and the LRA in Northern Uganda.

Economic interests, which later became dominant variables in shaping Uganda's relation with the South, were not that much prominent in the period preceding the signing of the CPA agreement. This wouldn't come as a surprise after all. Previously, naturally endowed and lucrative as it was, the South had little to offer in terms of business opportunities for Ugandans' as an economically disfranchised region of the Sudan and given Khartoum's strong sphere of influence. But this was to dramatically change following the establishment of the semi-autonomous administration of the South in 2006, driven by two main factors. Relative stability in the South following the CPA implementation introduced some level of normalcy in the lives of many southerners. This had immediate economic consequence in the

form of increased trading activities, not least due to demands for goods, which were readily supplied by Ugandan traders (Titeca cited in Høigilt, Falch & Rolandsen, 2010). Bilateral trade between Uganda and South Sudan appears to have grown by 1 000 percent between 2006 and 2008 (Uganda Bureau of Statistics cited in Appuli, 2014). As part of this trend, South Sudan bought 20 percent of Uganda's export goods, making it Uganda's largest customer since 2006 (Koos and Gutschke, 2014). By 2008, South Sudan became Uganda's largest export markets with Kampala's official export totaling USD 260 million per year and informal export estimated to be USD 170 million per month (Høigilt, Falch & Rolandsen, 2010). Accordingly, during the Interim Period (2005–2011), Uganda emerged as South Sudan's largest trading partner: its exports were worth US\$187 in 2010 (Le Riche and Arnold, 2012).

As we are to see later, Uganda's economic interest would become much more prominent with the emergence of infrastructure projects such as highways connecting the two countries and notably with the increase in Ugandan citizens residing in South Sudan. As Juba started to share part of oil the revenues with Khartoum, individual investments by Ugandans started to flourish. In addition, the two countries (along with Kenya and Rwanda), were also exploring ways of building refinery or pipeline that serve them all (Uganda Bureau of Statistics cited in Appuli, 2014).

Uganda's all-rounded interests and engagements in the South had ebbed and flowed throughout the years, notably during the second civil war in the South; the CPA negotiations and the establishment of the semi-autonomous GoSS; and in the interim period before the outbreak of the 2013 crisis. Some links such as the social and cultural ties were long lasting and could be considered

generally immutable for the major part all along. In contrast, economic interests, which were insignificant, rose to preeminence after 2006. The threat from LRA and its ability to operate from South Sudan significantly waned in the 2000s as compared to its peak in the 1990s. However, one variable appears to be a major 'constant' in defining Uganda's relation with the South and still remains potent today, namely the 'Museveni factor'.

President Yoweri Museveni has been ruling Uganda since 1986 and he has been a major provider of policy direction to shape the relationship between the two countries (ICG, 2010a, 2010b). Some may discount his role as megalomaniac in many regards, given his personalized approach to politics in the region including in South Sudan. There is, however, an ideological underpinning to his long-standing leaning towards the South and conversely to his possible apathy/long-standing suspicion of Khartoum. Yoweri Museveni was considered as among the new breed of leaders in the 1990s who managed to become the darlings of the Western world. At the same time, many believe that he considers himself as a Pan Africanist who viewed the issues of South Sudan through the prism of 'Africans versus Arabs'.⁵ Others also allege that his personal friendship with the late John Garang was important in explaining his leaning to the southern cause.⁶ In their early years, the two leaders had studied together at Makerere University, Uganda and both later become leaders of liberation movement in their countries. No matter the true source of the exact motivation and intent, the personal role of Yoweri Museveni is pivotal today as it was in the past in terms of understanding the factors that influenced the relation between the two countries.

1.2. Ethiopia

As a country which underwent different regime changes with evident policy departures, Ethiopia's interest in and engagement with South Sudan need to be contextualized and understood within different periods. Emperor Haile Selassie was credited for facilitating the Addis Ababa Agreement in 1972, which ended the First Sudanese Civil War. At one level, this could be considered as an attempt to remain a neutral arbitrator in the crisis.

This was to give way later to an overt partisan engagement with Sudan in the 1980's when Ethiopia was ruled by Mengistu Hailemariam. This time around, Ethiopia was openly lending its support to SPLA, although "its alleged support to Sudanese dissidents pre-dating the SPLA began in the 1976" (Johnson cited in ICG, 2010b, p. 12). Rather than a country anomaly, however, Ethiopia's support to SPLA need to be understood as part of a prevailing region-wide trend of the time in which most countries in the region were in constant proxy war against each other. In this case, Khartoum was supporting different insurgent groups which were fighting to topple the military regime in Ethiopia. Ethiopia retaliated to this by providing extensive and crucial support including bases, training, political direction, weapons and other supplies (ICG, 2010b). Furthermore, Ethiopia allowed the SPLA to establish a military base in Gambella and a political office in Addis Ababa.

Ethiopia's support to the SPLA ceased, although transiently, in the early 1990s when the EPRDF led government came to power and there are two competing explanations for that. Some attribute that Ethiopia had embarked on a recalibration of its foreign policy orientation that included ending its proxy conflicts with its neighbors and not

⁵ Interview with a South Sudanese scholar, Juba, July 5, 2018.

⁶ Interview with a researcher at an international think tank, Juba, July 6, 2018.

supporting insurgent groups in the region.⁷ Others allege that the new regime in Ethiopia withdrew its support to SPLA as the new regime considered the SPLA to have been close to Mengistu and was employed in his strategy against EPRDF (ICG, 2010b). None of these two explanations are potent in the longer term as Ethiopia soon resumed its support to SPLA not long before mid-1990s.

The EPRDF led government had made rapprochement efforts with Khartoum in the early 1990s. According to ICG (2010b, p. 12), this included following a deliberate policy to contain “the danger posed by the National Islamic Front (NIF) – an increasingly expansionist Islamic regime with an international agenda – that had consolidated its grip in Khartoum and was pursuing destabilizing activities in the region, thus threatening Ethiopian security”. Nevertheless, the assassination attempt on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa by Islamists supported by Sudan, was an important milestone influencing Ethiopia’s rapprochement with the Sudan and consequently with the SPLA.

In the aftermath of the assassination attempt, Ethiopia renewed its support to the SPLA to offset Sudan’s political influence in the region, particularly as it was wary of the expansion of Islamists in the region. Ethiopian forces were alleged to have fought battles with government forces inside Sudan in the 1990’s as part of campaigns intended to change the behavior of the Khartoum government (ICG, 2010b). Following the 1998 Ethio-Eritrea war, Ethiopia improved its relations with Khartoum and increasingly established economic and business ties. Thaw in estranged relation between Addis and Khartoum was nonetheless unfolding parallel with Ethiopia’s implicit support to the IGAD led negotiation which aimed, among others, to ensure the self-determination of the

South. At this juncture, it is important to raise the underlying national interests and threat considerations that shaped Ethiopia’s engagement with the South within the different periods.

As highlighted earlier, from the perspective of threat analysis, Ethiopia was guided by the need to counterbalance Khartoum’s support to insurgencies vying to unseat or militarily contest successive regimes in Addis Ababa. This was more evident during the military regime and evinced by its support to SPLA which reciprocated Khartoum’s backing to the various rebel forces which were fighting the military regime. Following the downfall of the military regime, a similar consideration prevailed both to counter the threat of Islamists and to pre-empt Sudan from offering similar support to Ethiopia’s rebels. This time Ethiopia tried to balance its engagement with the Khartoum with that of SPLA. The IGAD led negotiation provided an opportune platform to maintain that difficult equilibrium.

Ethiopia was also wary of the spillover effects of the civil war in the southern Sudan, from two major dimensions. A continuation of the civil war in the South had an obvious humanitarian consequence as it was generating a recurrent refugee crisis. From humanitarian relief perspective, Ethiopia simply could not afford the social and environmental cost of indefinitely caring for refugees from southern Sudan and an enduring solution was imperative for the crisis across the border. But more seriously, Ethiopia also wanted to avert both the social and security implications of the civil war in the South to the Gambella region.⁸ This was more evident as the refugee influx threatened to unsettle the ethnic balance in the Gambella

⁷ Interview with an Ethiopian diplomat, July 16, 2018, Addis Ababa.

⁸ Ethiopia’s Gambella region, home to the Nuer ethnic groups and which are also the second populous groups in southern Sudan, bore the brunt of these recurrent crisis.

region, where the number of the Anuak (a hitherto numerically dominant ethnic group) was gradually overtaken by the Nuer. Ethnic tensions became more regular in the Gambella region in part due to demographic changes occasioned by refugee influx. While the above was more pertinent to Ethiopia's security interests, Addis Ababa has also regional security concerns as it did not want the continuation of the Sudan civil war, especially "given the volatile situation in Somalia, continued confrontation with Eritrea and its own domestic fragility" (ICG, 2010b, p.i)."

Economic consideration became only evident in the interim period between the establishment of the semi-autonomous GoSS and the outbreak of the 2013 South Sudan civil war. Though there were no official figures, small and medium businesses owned by Ethiopians began flourishing in search of new business frontiers in South Sudan. Almost in a very short duration, Ethiopians controlled certain segments of the economy in the South notably in the hospitality and transport industry. Notwithstanding this, in shaping Ethiopia's engagement with the South, economics, though still relevant, was a distant fourth behind the security, politics, and social factors presented earlier.

1.3. Kenya

Unlike Ethiopia and Uganda whose partiality was palpable during the second civil war in the southern Sudan, Kenya more or less had managed to avoid becoming party to the conflict (Hemmer, 2010). At the same time, Kenya's sympathetic position to the 'southern' cause was also too evident. Kenya thus had managed "to be pro-South without being anti-North" (ICG, 2010b, p.1). The political support Kenya provided to SPLA was an important indication of Kenya's leaning to the South. This was especially critical during the brief period when SPLA was expelled from Ethiopia in the early 1990s and Kenya hosted the SPLA political office. Kenya also gave sanctuary to many refugees from the South

during the multiple stages of the civil war and this had created a long-standing people-to-people relation with the territory that would later become South Sudan. Many southerners had lived, studied, and worked in Kenya and that trend still continues to date. This social link between the two countries was also an important element which underlie their relation. The two countries had shared ethnic ties as communities such as the Toposas, are to be found on both sides of their borders.⁹

A combination of national interest and threat considerations had shaped Kenya's engagement in South Sudan in the period predating the latter's independence. In general, regional security, socio-political considerations and refugee influx underpinned Kenya's lead role in the negotiation of the CPA. Insecurity in borderland areas where the two countries shared ethnic communities was also a longstanding concern.

As in the case of Uganda and Ethiopia, Kenya's economic interest became more prominent following the signing of the CPA. Nevertheless, some would argue Kenya's economic interest in the South predated that period claiming Kenya's economy had benefitted from humanitarian operations in the 1990's intended to Sudan such as Operational Lifeline Sudan (OLS).¹⁰ Kenya was the launching pad for the Operations' Southern Sector and was a hub of the numerous NGOs that buttressed the huge humanitarian activities. The economic rationale of such operations was in terms of the employment opportunities it had generated for Kenyans in the NGOs sectors as well as in terms of some level of economic dividend from serving as the launching pad of such a huge logistics operation.

⁹ Interview with a South Sudan scholar, Juba, July 6, 2018.

¹⁰ Interview with a South Sudan scholar, Juba, July 6, 2018.

Importantly, following the establishment of the semi-autonomous GoSS, Kenya's economic and business interests grew extensively. The remit of investments by Kenyans in South Sudan included banking, insurance, aviation, construction, hospitality, information and communication technologies (ICT), transportation, as well as wholesale and retail trade (Odhiambo & Muluvi, 2014). These investments created substantial dividends to the Kenyan economy, mainly by way of export trading and employment opportunities for Kenyans in South Sudan. In 2012, Kenyan formal exports to South Sudan were valued at 209 million USD. Shipments to and from South Sudan accounted for approximately 12 percent of transit traffic at the Mombasa port, an increase of 83.8 percent over 2011 (Koos and Gutschke, 2014). By 2012, South Sudan became an important export destination for Kenya accounting for 10.2 percent of Kenyan total exports to Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA).¹¹ One of the most strong indicator of Kenya's expanding economic interest in South Sudan was the plan to develop mega infrastructure projects such as the Lamu Port-South-Sudan-Ethiopia (LAPSSET) corridor.¹² However, this project, which was expected to foster transport linkage between Kenya and its neighbors as well as promoting economic development for Northern Kenya by boosting trade, was clearly threatened by the instability in South Sudan (Odhiambo & Muluvi, 2014).

1.4. Sudan

A focus on no other country than Sudan helps more in understanding the regional dynamics in South Sudan. This may not come as a surprise as South Sudan broke away from Sudan and became independent in 2011 based on the provisions of the CPA. As such, for the period predating 2011, it is not reasonable to treat the two as separate political entities. With this caveat, however, it is feasible to broadly analyze Khartoum's interests in its southern territory first for the period up to the establishment of a separate state in the South and later for the interim period up to the outbreak of the 2013 South Sudan civil war. In addition, Khartoum's policy was the point of reference against which every other country in the region seeks to recalibrate its respective engagement.

Sudan got its independence from the British in 1956 and its territory included current day South Sudan. Even before that period, southerners were making demands for some form of self-rule or independence from the British colonialists which had failed to respond to these demands. Independent Sudan, therefore, had inherited southern political demands as disparate as federation, different forms of self-rule, and in extreme cases sessions claims (Johnson, 2016). Such unfulfilled requests were further amplified by Khartoum's evident governance failure to properly administer the South, which was more and more disfranchised and marginalized.

Successive rebellions by southerners, thus came in these contexts over claims of "unlawful abrogation of a degree of southern self-rule that was ensured by the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement, south ward spread of pious Islam, economic marginalization as well as social discrimination of southerners" (AU Commission of Inquiry, 2014, p.18). The CPA,

¹¹ This puts South Sudan as the fourth-largest export destination for Kenya out of the 18 other members of COMESA. Exports to the COMESA region constitute 34 percent of total Kenyan exports to the world. Kenya Bureau of Statistics, Economic Survey 2013 cited in Odhiambo and Muluvi, 2014.

¹² The LAPSSET corridor, jointly launched in March 2012 by Kenya, South Sudan and Ethiopia, involves the construction of a new transport corridor from the new Port of Lamu through the Kenyan towns of Garissa and Isiolo with one part of the corridor connecting Kenya and Ethiopia. The other part of the corridor will connect Kenya and South Sudan through Isiolo and border town of Nakodok. The LAPSSET project comprises a new road network, a railway line, an oil refinery at Lamu, an oil pipeline, airports in Lamu and Isiolo, and resort cities in Isiolo and at the shores of Lake Turkana (Odhiambo and Muluvi, 2014).

which came at the back of many other preceding agreements, protocols, and negotiations,¹³ was an attempt to address the long-standing question of (self) governance by ensuring the right of self-determination for Southerners.¹⁴

Initially, the CPA was by no means conceived with the South's secession as its major and strategic end-state. Rather, parties to the agreement were offered a 'grace period' of six years during which time they would strive to make unity attractive to southerners (Johnson, 2016). Nevertheless, the six years were unceremoniously spent without accomplishing some of the agreements entailed within the CPA, either as result of lack of commitment or capacity. According to Hilde Johnson (2016), this critically tested Khartoum's seriousness about the CPA provisions and more so in the face of mounting popular sentiment for independence among southerners.

Any meaningful chance of the South's unity with Khartoum was dealt further blow with the death of Dr. John Garang, who was championing a vision for New Sudan, without necessarily advocating for the South's secession. As Sudan got grips with the realities of a looming secession of the South, it had to unceremoniously reorient its relations with the future independent South Sudan. This was, nonetheless, based on old tactics of dividing southerners and cognizant of new realities such as the loss of significant oil revenues and territories; ongoing rebellions in the North including in Darfur as well as in South Kordofan

and Blue Niles areas. Given such historically rooted linkages, Sudan had a number of interests at stake in what is to become later South Sudan.

Security was its overriding interest given Sudan's fragile security at that time.¹⁵ Apart from the widely internationalized Darfur crisis, Khartoum had to deal with armed insurgencies in different parts of the country including in the Nuba Mountains, South Kordofan and Blue Niles areas. Some of these armed rebellions were closely affiliated with or supported by SPLA which by now had been in power in the South since 2006. Khartoum's military and political triumph over these groups could only be ensured to the extent that the SPLA-led South Sudan is either unable or unwilling to support these groups. Therefore, Khartoum was considered to have an interest to ensure the realization of either of these scenarios. And Khartoum was alleged to have preferred the former in the past.¹⁶ Sudan also had (various) economic interests which it sought to maintain with the impending secession of the South. The most evident is the loss of oil revenue that Khartoum would incur as most of the oil fields were located in the South.

In the case of both interests mentioned above, Sudan appeared to be bent on protecting its interests embracing a zero-sum posturing. In order to contain the threat from armed insurgents supported by SPLA, Khartoum was alleged to have preferred instability in South Sudan, which favors Sudan as a South Sudan embroiled in its own instability could not arm and support Khartoum's opposition. This would allow Sudan's various pro-government militias to freely continue recruitment among South

¹³ The CPA began with the Declaration of Principles in 1988 in Koka Dam, Ethiopia, but before it was finally concluded in Naivasha, Kenya and officially signed in Nairobi on 9 January, 2005, it had seen many a negotiation venue: from Abuja, Nigeria, to Machakos, Kenya. It was a product of many unrelenting efforts including diplomatic and financial support, pressure and threats, by regional organizations such as the United Nations, the Inter-Governmental Agency on Development (IGAD) and the African Union, as well as foreign governments such as the United States, United Kingdom and Norway (Jok 2015).

¹⁴ On the other hand, as we are to see later, the Agreement also left lingering and follow on issues which perpetuated the new nation's instability and complex relation, both *vis a vis* Sudan and internally among South Sudanese elites.

¹⁵ The signing and implementation of the CPA were coterminous with the peak stages of the Darfur crisis.

¹⁶ Interview with Juba based researcher, July 5, 2018.

Sudanese.¹⁷ Likewise, Khartoum sought to offset its loss of oil revenues, estimated to be about 70% what it used to be prior to the secession of the South, “by levying exorbitant oil transportation tariffs, process, and transit fees for exporting South Sudan’s crude through its pipeline to Port Sudan on the Red Sea coast” (Kuol, 2018, p.2).

Khartoum’s political interest is also worth examining. Given the intricate economic, security, political linkages, Khartoum was desirous of having a means that would allow it to continue exerting its influence in the South. Khartoum sought to achieve this by maintaining friendly South Sudanese elites closer to the helm of power in Juba. This was not difficult given Khartoum’s previous history which used to support certain factions in the South which had a fallout with the SPLA. A case in point was the support it provided to Riek Machar and Lam Akol in 1991 (Johnson, 2016). Sudan’s border politics with South Sudan also constitutes an important national interest consideration. This is because as the two countries were not able to resolve the issues involving some of the disputed border areas, including the oil-producing region of South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Abyei which were being administered by Sudan. As such, the status quo, symbolized by non-demarcation of the borders and was increasingly rendered unlikely to change anytime soon due to instability in South Sudan, would favor Khartoum.

1.5. Patterning regional interests in South Sudan prior to the 2013 civil war

During South Sudan’s pre-independence period, Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia maintained their own disparate as well as shared interests in Sudan. These interests defined their respective engagement with actors and issues within Sudan’s former territory that is now called South Sudan. The three countries had different forms of engagement in Sudan motivated by factors

such as maintaining regional security, preventing spillover effects into neighboring nations, developing the economy in order to expand trading relationships, and developing internal national resources to stimulate economic growth, refugee and humanitarian assistance in order to bring an end to the devastation caused by the civil war (Schafer, 2007).

For Uganda, counter-balancing Sudan’s support to LRA as well as checking what it considered Khartoum’s drive to ‘Islamization and Arabization’ of the region motivated its military and diplomatic support to the rebellion in the South. Kampala’s support was also buttressed by moral-based arguments such as solidarity with marginalized and disfranchised population of the South. Ethiopia’s historical support to southern rebels was similarly underlain by consideration of offsetting Sudan’s influence and hegemony in the region which used to harbor and support most of Ethiopia’s insurgent groups. While Kenya sought to appear a neutral player, it was generally considered to be sympathetic to the “southern” cause, not least due to the political support it used to provide for the SPLA.

Among the above-mentioned transversal set of interests, the three countries prioritized regional security, social-political considerations, the issue of refugees, and their support for self-determination in the South over and above the pursuit of their individual economic and other interests. In fact, economic interests, which are later to dominate the regional policies after the outbreak of the war, were not one of the top five priorities of these countries.¹⁸ Rather than dividing these three countries, individual national and collective regional interests /threat considerations were sufficiently

¹⁷ Interview with Juba based researcher, July 5, 2018.

¹⁸ Interview with Juba based researcher, Juba, July 5, 2018.

balanced and the latter consequently formed the minimum agreement that was needed to push for the conduct of the 2011 referendum in the South as envisaged by the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and later for the ensuring South Sudan's independence. While these countries had maintained different forms of interventions in the South, they were united more or less by their leaning or support to SPLM or politically, to calls for the self-determination of the South. This was critical in understanding why and how the region failed later to intervene as a unified actor in South Sudan after the 2013 crisis.

Quite naturally, Sudan is the exception to the above as it had a diametrically opposite and contending interests' *vis-a-vis* the others. Sudan's primary interest was to avert the looming secession of the South and to continue exerting its influence in the area. Nevertheless, Sudan's interest and position, was increasingly weakened by its own internal contradictions such as armed rebellions in Darfur and other parts of the country as well as sustained pressure from the international community. The latter was in response to Khartoum's support to international Islamic jihadist groups. Consequently, Sudan had failed to outweigh the influence, interests, and engagements of South Sudan's other neighbors. An important question to ask at this juncture is to what extent the geometry of regional interests would change and what would the effect of these changes be following the outbreak of the South Sudanese civil war in 2013.

Part Two

2. Interventions by South Sudan's neighboring countries during and after the 2013 conflict

Unlike the pre-independence and early independence period, each of South Sudan's neighboring countries jockeyed their own disparate interests following the outbreak of the 2013 civil war. Clear divergence in regional interests in South Sudan became a defining feature of the time. In some cases, parochial economic interests trumped/ came at the expense of what could be considered the interests of peace in South Sudan. As such, the noble idea of peace in South Sudan and saving South Sudanese from the scourge of violence failed to serve as the basis for forging "minimum collective agreement" among countries in the region. This section provides a country by country analysis of the interests and modes of intervention of South Sudan's neighbors to illustrate the above argument.

2.1. Uganda

Arguably, Uganda had the most conspicuous form of direct and partisan intervention in the South Sudan crisis. It sent its soldiers within 72 hours of the first fighting in Juba. The intervention had the clear impact of saving Juba being overrun by opposition forces. Initially, Uganda's intervention received the region's support on the grounds that "it would stop further bloodshed given the imminent attack of the capital by opposition forces" (Johnson, 2016, p.72). The Ugandan government had advanced a number of reasons for its intervention. As aptly summarized by the Ugandan scholar Philip K. Apuuli (2014), these justifications include invitation by the legitimate government of South Sudan to ensure order; evacuation of Ugandan citizens caught up in the fighting;

request by the United Nations Secretary-General to intervene; and sanctions by the regional organization IGAD.

Despite these justifications, the intervention was increasingly questioned on its intent, process and legality. Though the intention initially could be well-meaning to “stop the bloodshed, the anarchy and the death of many more South Sudanese”, Uganda appeared a biased and partisan actor, at least in the eyes of those who did not necessarily view the crisis from the prism of political rivalry but rather from an ethnic one.¹⁹ Especially, this did not bode well among the South Sudanese who historically viewed Uganda as their second home and President Yoweri Museveni as a fatherly figure for his support to the country’s independence.²⁰

The intervention was also questionable procedurally, particularly for lacking the prior consent of Uganda’s parliament.²¹ A Ugandan scholar interviewed for this study characterized the process as follows:

It was a unilateral decision (by the president) that was rubberstamped by the parliament after the fact (the intervention) as the president asked parliament’s approval after the Ugandan soldiers were already in South Sudan. Alternatively, the President could have called for an emergency cabinet meeting to approve the decision and this did not happen either. In any case, it was one-man decision taken without the prior consent of the parliament.²²

Similarly, the legality of the intervention also became a subject of debate. Kassaja Philip Apuuli (2014) interrogated the issue and concluded that while Uganda’s (limited)

engagement could be justified emanating from the request of the South Sudan government, the participation of Ugandan troops [in fighting on the side of the Kiir government] further renders the intervention illegal.

Rather than the above-mentioned justifications, the actual motivations behind Uganda’s controversial move are to be found in the historical, security, political and economic interests that Uganda sought to protect by sustaining the regime in Juba (Berouk Mesfin, 2015). Some of these interests (security and political ones) are pre-existing historically and others (economic considerations) were recently ‘discovered’ and nurtured, especially since establishment of the GoSS in 2006.

Politically, it could be argued that a major intent was preserving the status quo and preempting the establishment of a Khartoum friendly government in Juba that would not allow Kampala to exert its economic/political influence in South Sudan. With Dr. Riek Machar, as the public face of the rebellion and as someone who had previous history of close relationship with Khartoum, this argument is not to be discounted easily.

Security interests were also at play. The LRA had been weakened throughout the years increasingly due to sustained campaigns by Ugandan Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF) as well as by regional and international actors (such as the Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the LRA [RCI-LRA]). South Sudan had been a key player in this regard both in terms of its bilateral arrangements with Kampala and as part of the regional coalition. As one analyst alluded, continued instability, total state collapse, or a Khartoum friendly government in South Sudan were all likely scenarios that would resuscitate LRA and enable it to launch

¹⁹ Interview with a veteran diplomat of the region, Addis Ababa, July 25, 2018.

²⁰ Interview with Juba based researcher, Juba, July 5, 2018.

²¹ Ugandan Parliament endorsed the deployment on January 14 after government said UPDF was there to facilitate evacuation of stranded Ugandans and secure critical South Sudan state installations, including Juba Airport (Butagira, 2014).

²² Interview with a veteran diplomat of the region, Addis Ababa, July 25, 2018.

attacks on Uganda.²³ Uganda needed to make sure this was not happening.

For some analysts, such as Kassaja Philip Apuuli (2014), economic considerations provide a stronger explanation behind Uganda's overt support of the government in an otherwise internal conflict. As shown in part one, Uganda has a lot of economic interests in South Sudan that it needed to protect including its boosting bilateral trade and investments by its citizens. In fact, the Ugandan Parliament endorsed the deployment of UPDF, after the fact, to facilitate evacuation of stranded Ugandans and secure critical South Sudan state installations, including Juba Airport (Butagira, 2014).

Apart from this otherwise seemingly legitimate consideration, speculations also abound that Uganda had been receiving payment for its military services in Juba. Some media reports confirmed these allegations citing South Sudan's defence minister Kuol Manyang Juuk, who confirmed that "We (South Sudan) are funding all activities of UPDF and SPLA (Sudan People's Liberation Army)" (Butagira, 2014). Although difficult to establish the exact amount paid to Uganda, the issue amplified the suspicion that Uganda was primarily pursuing financial and economic motives in South Sudan.

Paradoxically, Uganda's unilateral military intervention foreshadowed its engagement in the regional mediation efforts. Increasingly, Uganda's military intervention was considered as "the most damning" from the perspective of the interests of regional states that complicated the peace process (Vertin, 2018, p.9). As a country that had troops on the ground fighting alongside government forces, Uganda was rightly considered a party to the conflict. In addition, the Ugandan government was providing support to controversial political initiatives such as Juba's national dialogue process and convening of early

national elections, even as the crisis was still unfolding in various forms (Kuol, 2018). Thus its participation in the IGAD mediation process, though it was not playing a lead role, was difficult to accept for many South Sudanese.²⁴ But more ominous was the regional confrontation that was in the making due to the Ugandan military intervention, especially with Sudan. As one-time UN SRSG Hilde Johnson (2016, p.273) stated, coupled with Juba's use of Darfurian rebel fighters from the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) to fight SPLM-IO, there was an imminent internationalization of the crisis as Uganda's "engagement could prompt Sudan to enter the conflict on Machar's side".

2.2. Ethiopia

Along with other neighboring countries, Ethiopia early in the crisis became part of the IGAD peacemaking initiative which kicked off in December 2013. With two other emissaries from Kenya and Sudan, Ethiopia's former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Seyoum Mesfin, was appointed as IGAD's Special Envoy for South Sudan. Addis Ababa became the venue of successive peace talks throughout the crisis. Side by side with its role in the peacemaking track, Ethiopia continued its already existing peacekeeping engagement in South Sudan both through UNISFA and UNMISS. In the latter, Ethiopia progressively expanded its presence numerically and diversified its contingent following the outbreak of the civil war in 2013. Ethiopia, as a country sharing a long border with South Sudan and which had hitherto only contributed individual police officers, upped its role in UNMISS in order to curtail the spillover effects of the crisis in its territory.²⁵ Ethiopia deployed two battalions of military

²³ Interview with South Sudanese university lecturer, Juba, July 5, 2018.

²⁴ Interview with South Sudanese university lecturer, Juba, July 5, 2018.

²⁵ Skype interview with a former UNMISS police officer, July 20, 2018

contingent to UNMISS covering areas of operations including Jonglei and Upper Nile States which are bordering Ethiopia's Gambella National Regional State.

Ethiopia's engagement in the crisis were underpinned by a set of considerations, national and regional security being the most prominent ones. The security implications, especially for Ethiopia's restive Gambella region, had been well known. Geographic proximity and ethnic ties, especially the presence of the Nuer on both sides of the border, meant that the crisis could easily spill over to Gambella. This became increasingly ominous as the ethnic dimension of the South Sudan crisis was evident almost from its onset. At the peak of the crisis, the increasing influx of refugees, most of them Nuers, to the Gambella region were considered as likely factors that fuel "the already existing tension not only between the Anuak and the Nuer but also between the Anuak political organizations and the Ethiopian government" (Dereje Feyssa, 2014). This is on top of other consequences for Ethiopia's Gambella region, which included heightened competition over natural resources and public health risks such as measles and to a lesser extent Ebola. Given the strong ethnic undertone of the crisis, there were also signs of cross border mobilization among Ethiopian Nuers in support of their ethnic kin on the other side. Dereje further argued, politically, this would be a strong challenge to the Ethiopian government's official policy of neutrality in the South Sudan crisis.

Concerns for regional security and its impacts on its own interests were also behind Ethiopia's engagement in the crisis. Ethiopia, which was already deeply involved in Somalia almost with no end in sight, would not want to have similar predicament on its western frontiers that would demand its engagement or would affect its interests in one way or another. Ethiopia was also well aware of the implicit implications of the changing patterns of the regional alliances which

ebb and flow with the conflict dynamics in South Sudan. In this case, Ethiopia was wary of emergence of a possible coalition between the South Sudan and Egypt that would jeopardize the regional alliance it had nurtured in the context of cooperation on the use of the waters of the River Nile. Rumors fueling these suspicions abound at the time. Most worrying to Addis Ababa were those alluding that Egypt had acquired a military base in South Sudan which would enable it to launch aerial attacks on strategic interests in Ethiopia, importantly on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD).²⁶ Similarly, the Ethiopian engagement was driven by concern to counterbalance Eritrean influence in South Sudan, which was alleged to be covertly providing support to opposition forces (Berouk Mesfin, 2015).

Despite its self-perception as a neutral regional player, Ethiopia's involvement in South Sudan was not without controversy, although not to the level comparable to other neighboring countries such as Uganda and Sudan and to a lesser extent Kenya. Especially, handling of its mediation roles was a subject of criticism: for example on the choice of the mediation venue; contest to leadership of the peace process with Kenya and importantly on the approach followed by the team (Johnson, 2016). In the latter sense, Johnson highlighted that there were criticisms at the outset, regarding Seyoum Mesfin's emergence as a Chief Mediator who had made important decisions on strategy, even though no provisions existed for that.²⁷ In terms of approach to mediation, Seyoum was criticized by the South Sudanese side for dictating the negotiations. This came in apparent response to his perhaps well-

²⁶ GERD has been a source of controversy between the two countries as Egypt initially claimed the construction of the dam would lead to reduction of its water share from the Nile River.

²⁷ Without providing specific details, Veritn (2018, p.4) also alluded that Seyoum had made early tactical mistakes which made apparent that he, despite his credentials at home and abroad, had less mediation experience than many had assumed.

intentioned statement that “negotiators from the government and the rebels would not leave Ethiopia without reaching a peace deal by 17 August (2015)” (South Sudan Accuses IGAD Chief Mediator of ‘Dictating’ Negotiations, 2015). President Kiir had earlier echoed a similar sentiment (of being coerced) claiming that he had signed the May 9th 2015 agreement under duress as Ethiopia’s prime minister, Hailemariam Desalegn, threatened to arrest him should he fail to sign the deal (S. Sudanese rebel leader decries president Kiir’s remarks on peace agreements 2014). Such criticisms, most often by members of the South Sudanese government, seemed to tie into an existing perception that Ethiopia was leaning in its support towards the opposition. Though these are no conclusive indications, the latter came due to allegation that some SPLM-IO fighters were found to be carrying Ethiopian national IDs and passports and Addis Ababa had hosted Riek Machar on a number of occasions.²⁸

2.3. Kenya

Striking similarities exist in the way both Kenya and Ethiopia had been engaging with the South Sudan crisis. As in the case of Ethiopia, it played a role in the regional mediation appointing CPA veteran General Lazaro Sumbeiywo as an envoy to the IGAD peace process. Until the withdrawal of its contingent in November 2016, Kenya was part of the UN peacekeeping contingent in South Sudan (UNMISS). Like Ethiopia, Kenya had an official policy of keeping its neutrality in the conflict. However, there were moments during which Kenya was perceived to have crossed its position of neutrality. The ‘red carpet treatment’ Nairobi offered to Dr. Riek Machar in May 2014 had upset the South Sudanese government considering it was tantamount to recognizing an opposition government formed in exile (South Sudan: Kenyan MPs Criticize Kenyatta Over ‘Red Carpet’ Reception, 2014). Conversely, the arrest and repatriation of Gen. Peter Gadet,

spokesperson of SPLM-IO in Nairobi in November 2016, gave the impression that Kenya was unduly leaning to the government (Kenya deports South Sudan rebel leader’s spokesman to Juba, 2016).

Kenya also shared similar concerns with Ethiopia regarding the humanitarian and security consequences of the refugee crisis emerging from the civil war in South Sudan. Kenya, overburdened with its humanitarian obligations of hosting Somali refugees in camps such as Daddab, was also home to many South Sudanese. Refugee influx would have adverse impacts and consequences including straining of resources and service delivery and compromising national and regional security not least as it would exacerbate security and proliferation of illegal small arms and light weapons (Odhiambo and Muluvi, 2014). Local level security concerns were also prevalent in areas bordering Kenya with South Sudan. Growing economic interests including booming prospects of infrastructure projects along with the safety of its citizens in South Sudan and their property was, however, considered as Kenya’s priority.²⁹

2.4. Sudan

Shared social ties and previous history of common statehood and violent conflict underlie Sudan’s engagement and interests in South Sudan, including in the context of the 2013 crisis. As a close neighbor with intricate linkages with Juba, Sudan had to juggle a combination of political, security and economic interests in its engagement in South Sudan’s civil war. In terms of geopolitical considerations, Khartoum needed to find ways of fending off Kampala’s influence in South Sudan, especially given

²⁸ Interview with a former South Sudan diplomat, Juba, July 6, 2018.

²⁹ Interview with a veteran diplomat of the region, Addis Ababa, July 25, 2018.

Uganda's active role in the crisis. Particularly, Sudan was wary that Uganda's presence would weaken its own influence and deprive its political or financial benefits (Berouk Mesfin, 2015). According to Berouk Mesfin, the latter were amplified at a point when Ugandan forces were deployed close to the oil fields in South Sudan's Unity and Upper Nile states causing great anxiety in Sudan regarding Kampala's real intentions. With one eye traded on Uganda, Khartoum had also to keep a close view of politics in Juba to ensure that its ongoing interests were not compromised. This was intended to "keeping tabs on developments there (Juba) if not also to weaken the South" (Kuol, 2018, p.4).

Sudan's regional rivalry with Uganda in South Sudan had also security implications for Khartoum. In this regard, deepening of rivalry with Uganda was a source of major concern for Khartoum, lest Uganda would provide weapons to Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF), a coalition of armed groups opposed to Sudan (Berouk Mesfin, 2015). Such a scenario would exacerbate Khartoum's security predicament, which was already marked by a complex network of insurgencies in Darfur, Nuba Mountain, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile. All these conflicts, including the South Sudan civil war, were interlinked in one way or another; and Khartoum, as a protagonist in most of them, had to have a good handle of things.

Further, Sudan had a number of economic and business interests that it had to protect in South Sudan, though the most obvious one was oil. In some ways, a prolonged conflict in South Sudan would benefit Khartoum. This is more valid in the case of interruption of South Sudan's support for insurgencies in Sudan, notably to those fighting in and around their shared borders. After all, South Sudan embroiled in its own internal crisis would not be able to support groups such as SPLM-N. Likewise, South Sudan, amidst its own difficulties, would not be in a position to find lasting solution to issues surrounding the

disputed border areas as provided by the CPA. Some of these areas are under Sudan's control, thus the *status quo* would favor Khartoum. At the same time, continuation of the crisis had also adverse economic implications. With biting economic difficulties at home, Khartoum would stand to lose additionally from the interruption of oil production in South Sudan as a result of the civil war.

Therefore, different dimensions of Khartoum's engagement in South Sudan's civil war need to be understood in such contending contexts whereby certain scenarios would favor Sudan's interests and others may not possibly do so. Reflecting these intricacies, Sudan maintained its rather complex engagement in South Sudan broadly marked by engagement in, and public support for, diplomatic efforts of ending the crisis on the one hand and implicitly by vacillating support to parties to the conflict on the other hand. For some observers, part of Khartoum's complex engagement was its preference for continuation of the crisis which was based on real-politik calculation of safeguarding its interest by following a policy of destabilization.³⁰ In this vein, a 2014 ISS analysis of regional interests in the South Sudan crisis opined:

In the short and medium terms, such a civil war would present the extraordinary opportunity of preventing the emergence of a stronger and oil-rich state allied to Uganda and it would allow Sudan to reestablish its traditional influence over South Sudanese politics characterized by increased polarization (Berouk Mesfin, 2014).

Hilde Johnson one-time UNSRSG in South Sudan, echoed a similar sentiment possibly attesting to Sudan's desire for a prolonged crisis in the South. Johnson (2016, p.274) stated that "Sudan was the only IGAD

³⁰ Interview with a Ugandan scholar, Kampala, July 13, 2018.

member state the seemed to be in no rush to reach an agreement during the regional peace talks". She added that Sudan's leadership advocated giving the parties more times, though the Sudanese government was publicly expressing deep concerns about developments on the ground.

Despite joining the mediation process, Khartoum had also maintained vacillating support to government and to opposition forces. Khartoum's initial leaning to President Salva Kiir was alleged to have been reversed in light of the conflict dynamics, notably the use of Sudan's rebel forces in the South Sudan civil war. Emblematic of old tactics of using local militias prevalent in the Sudan, South Sudan was alleged to have solicited the support of JEM and SPLM-N to fight alongside government forces (Machar forces claim Sudanese rebels backing government forces, 2016). For Khartoum, which was probably playing both sides up to mid/end of 2014, the role and presence of these rebel groups in South Sudan was unsettling and must have promoted its increasing tilt towards Machar's camp. In this regard, documents from London-based Armament Research as well as confidential reports citing security meetings in Khartoum had confirmed cases of Khartoum's support for the opposition including direct airdrops of weapons and ammunition from Sudan to SPLM-IO (Johnson, 2016).

2.5. Conclusion

Taking the different cases together, we observe that the respective interests and threat considerations of South Sudan's neighbors significantly diverged following the outbreak of the 2013 crisis. Largely as a reflection of the internal dynamics of the conflict and (mis)calculated preference of South Sudanese belligerents which favor their respective self-interests, some of the countries in the region took sides in supporting one or the other conflict party. Unlike the period predating South Sudan's

independence, historical and immediate self-interests took primacy in the respective calculations of the neighboring countries over and above the idea of peace in South Sudan. Importantly, the often subtle and at times overt partisan positions of Sudan and Uganda rearranged the matrix of regional interests in South Sudan. On their part, Ethiopia and Kenya, both having significant business and economic interests as well as citizens in South Sudan appeared to maintain a neutral stance in the crisis and took center stage in mediating the conflict. Nevertheless, both countries were criticized for lending subtle support for different conflict parties (Ethiopia to be pro-SPLM IO and Kenya for being pro-Former Detainees). As such, the pursuit of one's own business, economic, and political interests featured high in the neighboring countries' engagement in South Sudan. Failure to reach timely conclusion of the crisis and the inability of regional actors to enforce agreements fueled the suspicion that neighboring countries had vested interest in the conflict and had become part of what some South Sudanese scholars called economically motivated 'scramble for South Sudan'.³¹ Consequently, conflict parties used divergent regional interests to their own advantage with the clear consequence of prolonging the conflict. Such contestations and competing interests were to have their direct impact on resolving the crisis. The next section will examine this issue in relation to the peacekeeping mission in South Sudan.

³¹ Interview with South Sudanese university lecturer, Juba, July 5, 2018.

Part Three

3. National Interests, Neighbors Interventions and Implications for Peacekeeping in South Sudan

The South Sudan civil war and the attendant efforts of making peace in the country unfolded in the face of immense international attention and scrutiny. The tragic story of a country, which just got independence and swiftly descended into a horrifying chaos, became a narrative which many observers could relate with remorse for failing to act once again, whether as a region or as part of the wider international community. As shown in the previous section, an important corollary of this story was the role of neighbors and their national interest driven interventions in South Sudan following the crisis in 2013.

In the context of the interest driven regional interventions, it is worthwhile to highlight some key points from a few existing analyses that linked neighbors' interests, their interventions, and implications on the peacekeeping mission. An ISS Research Report published in 2014 needs to be highlighted, especially for pointing out the roles of these countries in changing the course of the conflict. The report states that "these regional states have actually changed the complexion of the crisis that broke out in December 2013 by openly joining the crisis, by secretly making opportunistic alliances with the two militarily balanced sides or by separately and together trying to mediate the crisis" (Berouk Mesfin, 2015, p.7). Similarly, in terms of shaping the trajectory of peace missions, notably the IGAD mediation, a report published by IPI in April 2018 alluded to remorseful statement from Seyoum Mesfin, Ethiopia's Special Envoy to the IGAD Mediation stating that national interests had "prevailed over IGAD's regional common interest and left IGAD in paralysis." A stronger and more united region," the chief mediator later lamented, "would have paved the way for AU and UN action" (Vertin, 2018, p.17).

A common thread within the above and other similar analyses is the conflictual nature of regional interests in South Sudan and how that adversely impacted the quest for peace broadly both in mediation and peacekeeping. In essence, lack of consensus among the different countries as well as failure to follow through agreed upon decision had continuously sent mixed/wrong signals to the parties on the ground. Consequently, parties to the conflict leveraged divergent regional interests in sustaining the conflict (including by receiving military and political support from some of the neighboring countries). Among others, this resulted in the delay in striking a binding peace agreement and later in the lack of the collective political will to enforce the same.

The above has a direct consequence in weakening the overall function of the peacekeeping mission to the extent that peacekeeping missions are generally conceived as ultimately operating towards an overarching political goal which took quite some time to establish in the case of South Sudan. In this vein, two specific dimensions are worth highlighting. The first and more direct implication refers to delayed deployment of the Regional Protection Force that was intended to create an enabling environment implementation of the Agreement (UNSC, 2016). The second, more indirect and broader implication pertains to the mandate and operations of UNMISS.

3.1. Implications on the timeline of deployment, intent, and tasks of the Regional Protection Force (RPF)

The UNSC, through Resolution 2304 (2016), authorized the deployment of RPF on 12 August 2016. The authorization came at the back of an earlier decision by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development

(IGAD) which was later endorsed by the AU Assembly on 18 July 2016. The Force was authorized with the broader objective of creating “an enabling environment for implementation of the Agreement” (UNSC, 2016, § 10). Within this broader mandate, its various tasks include: facilitation of free movement into, out of, and around Juba; protection of the Juba airport and other key facilities in the city, and promptly and effectively engaging any actor that was credibly deemed to be preparing to or engaged in attacking UN POC sites, other UN premises, UN personnel, humanitarian actors, and civilians.

When authorizing the RPF with a force strength of 4000 troops, the UNSC Resolution 2304 (2016, §13) had urged countries in the region “to expedite contributions of rapidly deployable troops to ensure the full deployment of the Regional Protection Force as soon as possible”.

Nevertheless, the deployment of the RPF was ostensibly delayed. Despite its authorization in August 2016 and initial consent to the protection force as early as a year before (September 2015), the first troops did not arrive before August 2017 (South Sudan: Deployment of UN-mandated regional protection force begins, 2017). The reluctance of the South Sudanese government had been a major factor behind the delay both on technical grounds such as forging armament agreements and timeline of deployment but at times citing sovereignty based political arguments. For instance, the deployment of the protection force at the Juba airport had been a controversial issue, though it was stipulated in the binding UNSC Resolution 2034 (South Sudan, UN argue over protection force mandate, 2017).

Analysts had also cited South Sudanese government’s perception of the interests of its neighbors as one more reason behind the reluctance for the deployment of the RPF, or at least for its delay. In this regard, South Sudan government was mentioned as being critical of the idea of neighboring states deploying in the

RPF (Williams, 2016). As such, possible entanglement of neighbors’ interest in South Sudan not only affected the timeline of the mission’s deployment, but as we are to see later, its force composition. Some countries in East Africa had already contributed to peacekeeping operations in South Sudan but South Sudan’s government had initially rejected the involvement of any neighboring countries in the RPF, which rules out military power from Ethiopia and Kenya (as well as Uganda) (Analyst questions whether UN ‘protection force’ in Juba will be effective. n.d.).

Overall, controversy over regional interests in South Sudan had its own practical implications on the course of the RPF which was conceived to be integral part of the existing UNMISS mission. One clear impact is the exclusion of three of the neighboring countries analyzed in this study. Previous ‘history’ of national interest-based involvement in South Sudan was cited for rejecting the participation of some neighboring countries in the RPF notably Uganda and Sudan. Particularly, the deployment of troops from the two countries, arguably strongly self-interested in the conflict, was deemed as contravention of the impartiality principle of UN peacekeeping (Jewish World Watch, 2016). This in turn was instrumental in watering down the political will and appetite to deploy the RPF, especially in the eyes of the South Sudanese government.

There was also lack of countries in the region that could send troops expediently for the robust ‘protection force’. Kenya had already withdrawn its forces from South Sudan over the dismissal of the Kenyan Force Commander of UNMISS. Ethiopian troops were only deployed in 2018 due to delays on technical ground.

But importantly, the RPF was deployed in August 2017, ostensibly after it had

significantly lost its momentum and to an extent its relevance and the Force could not be used for the intent and purposes that was originally meant by the UNSC resolution 2304 and the IGAD decision that preceded it. When the RPF was finally allowed to deploy, conditions on the grounds had changed and the protection purpose it meant to serve had significantly evolved. For example, its presence in Juba was considered as futile as the force was needed more outside of the capital (Voice of America, 2018). In due course, the RPF ended up serving purposes that are similar with the pre-existing UNMISS mission in the country.³² Calls to review the mandate and tasks of the RPF speak mainly to its ambivalent mandates. The South Sudanese government had requested for revisiting the mandate of the protection force citing “there is no further threat of violence in the capital Juba following last year’s clashes between rival forces” (South Sudan wants mandate of UN peacekeeping force reviewed, 2018).

3.2. Implications on UNMISS

The implications of divergent regional interests on the pre-existing UN mission (UNMISS) is more indirect, mainly arising out of inability to resolve the crisis in part due to divergent regional interests. More generally, UNMISS, the UN mission whose mandate evolved to protecting civilians fleeing from the abuses by the conflict parties, had difficulty in fully carrying out its mandates. UNMISS was facing frequent impediments by host government, which was at times hostile to the mission.³³ In addition, the mission lacked the robust and unified political support from the UNSC in enforcing sanction on violators of peace agreements, even in the face of direct attacks to the mission itself.³⁴ This

could, in part, be attributed to lack of unified action from the region that would have translated into binding UNSC decisions and actions.

As the war lingered on, not least abetted by lack of concerted regional action alluded earlier, UNMISS had to bear the brunt of the crisis and had to cater for immense expectations on it. Among other things, it was increasingly difficult for the mission to fully address the protection needs of the civilian population. The mission had a difficult relationship with the host government and as such it had to grapple with continued obstruction by the South Sudanese government. The latter included severe restrictions on freedom of movement and constraints on mission operations (UNSC, 2016). This precluded the mission, for example, from undertaking some of its major tasks including human rights observations and investigations as defined in its mandate.³⁵

In addition, the continued violence in the country and the expanding space it conquered severely contributed to a persistent prevalence of massive human rights violation. This further created the conditions in which a significant section of civilian population needed protection. By mid-2018, the mission was administering five Protection of Civilians (POC) sites, hosting about 200,000 South Sudanese. Therefore, the mission needed to have a preponderant focus on the protection of civilians under threat of physical violence utilizing its POC camps³⁶, as opposed to more

³² Telephone interview with security expert at an international organization, October 10, 2018.

³³ Itself caught under fire between the conflict, the UN mission had to deal at times with a hostile host government, which accused it being participant in the crisis (Johnson, 2016).

³⁴ Faced with this environment, UNMISS has received inadequate political and material support, particularly from the Security Council.

After three years of the parties using weapons, including heavy weapons, against civilians – and after the Council threatened sanctions if the government continued to impede the Mission – there is no arms embargo. UNMISS has come under deserved criticism for its performance, but it has too often been a scapegoat as the parties to the conflict, South Sudan’s regional neighbors and the Security Council have been unwilling or unable to halt atrocities or hold accountable those responsible (Wells, 2017).

³⁵ Telephone interview with security expert at an international organization, October 10, 2018.

³⁶ UN POC sites are located in Juba, Malakal, Wau, Bor, and Bentiu

than 2 million populations outside these camps that require its protection. An expert informant claims that the mission was reaching out only to 10% of the population that requires its protection. While its POC mandate extends in the broader sense, its existing focus appeared to be skewed to handling the IDP situation of those in the camps.³⁷ A recent interview with an international NGO expert familiar with the work of the UNMISS, echoed a much earlier observation by Stimson Center that UN troops were “consumed by the immediate issue of protecting civilians from attacks by government forces and other armed factions in and around the POC sites” (World Peace Foundation, 2017). But more ominously, according to WPF (2017, p.59) the overall POC functions of the mission appeared to have been decoupled from overarching political strategies to “creating political conditions in which civilians live”. This was more evident as the mission was operating for the major part with a POC mandate but in the absence of viable peace agreement.

3.3. Final conclusion and recommendation

In its conclusion, this research report reaffirms existing observations regarding neighbors’ potential and posturing to play contending roles in sustaining and ending conflicts. Alignment of national and regional security interests or at least convergence on common objective of furthering the South Sudan independence had been a unifying factor for Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda in the 1990s and 2000’s. During this period, the need for regulation/security both in regional and national contexts figured higher than any other interests in South Sudan. South Sudan’s independence and the country’s enlarged economic value later made it a point of regional contestation. As a newly discovered ‘periphery/fringe territory’ in the region with

immense economic potentials, South Sudan’s own interests including its stability in and by itself mattered less to some of its neighbors but to the extent as defined by the regional power centers or competing hegemony. The outbreak of civil war in South Sudan set the stage not only for bitter competition among key South Sudanese belligerents but also the bifurcation of regional interests. The latter came especially against the backdrop of decades long regional rivalry between Sudan and Uganda and pursuit of newly found economic self-interests almost by all the neighbors. As observed in the previous parts, divergence of regional interests had convoluted various attempts of making peace in South Sudan including the trajectories of the regional mediation and the peacekeeping mission.

In the final analysis, it became increasingly evident that neighboring countries are indeed unavoidable actors for peace, as they were in the civil war in South Sudan. This conclusion is in line with an earlier observation by the World Peace Foundation based on a consultation on ‘Regional Protection Force’ (RPF) for South Sudan. As one of the major lessons of two years of civil war, the policy memo produced by the WPF concluded “the unavoidable political interests of the neighboring states in the internal politics of South Sudan should be recognized and accommodated” (Sarkar, 2016).

From a policy perspective, therefore, the crux of the matter lies in finding creative and contextually rooted peacekeeping policies that strike the required balance between the self-interests of countries in the neighborhood and the collective regional quest for peace in a given context. Among others, the above requires the deliberate engagement of neighboring countries not just in the context of regional blocs (such as IGAD) but in a wider platform which could potentially sermon key

³⁷ In parallel to barriers to translating security warnings into action, UNMISS has also faced challenges in supporting IDP returns, in part because UN troops are consumed by the immediate issue of protecting civilians from attacks by government forces and other armed factions in and around the PoC sites (Stimson Report cited in World Peace Foundation, 2017).

global and regional players such as UNSC and AU PSC members.

Design and implementation of future peace missions in such contexts in Africa thus shall be based on multiple but simultaneously unfolding interventions. First regional mediations, which include front line states in any given context, need to give space not just for belligerents but also for mediating the interests of the neighboring countries. With participation of extra regional actors, such regional mediation strives to create a 'good enough' regional agreement involving the necessary trade-off between self-interest and quest for peace in the neighborhood. The creation of regional norms reflecting this agreement is helpful than opening the space for such negotiations every time a crisis arises in the region. Some suggestive elements of such norms include reaffirmation of impartiality in a given conflict as well as finding ways of safeguarding economic, political, security and other interests in the course of crisis.

Side by side, peacekeeping missions, whether in the traditional sense or entailing more peace enforcement functions, need to include neighboring countries whose interests by now is recognized, accommodated and regulated within the regional mediation process through the above mentioned agreement. Resource mobilization, monitoring and evaluation of the mandate implementation and overall progress of such peacekeeping missions shall rest not just with the sub-regional organizations (RECs/RM) but with the AU and other international players such as the UN, EU, and other relevant actors. Short of such deliberate strategies, neighbors will continue to project the classical catch 22 situation vacillating between unavoidable actors for peace and spoilers.

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