



## South Sudan's political transition and the Abyei and South Kordofan crises

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#### A NEW REALITY: TWO SUDANS

The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005 brought an end to 22 years of civil war between North and South Sudan and provided for a 6-year interim arrangement, ultimately paving the way for a self-determination referendum for the South. In January 2011, an overwhelming majority of southerners voted to break away from North Sudan. With the establishment of an independent Republic of South Sudan (ROSS) on 9 July 2011, the division of what used to be Africa's largest country has become a reality.

#### REINVENTING POLITICS IN AN INDEPENDENT SOUTH SUDAN

The referendum process was lauded as a great success by most observers. At the same time, the events in January and their aftermath brought to the surface a number of serious challenges for the world's newest sovereign polity.

First, the excessive control exercised by South Sudanese authorities over the referendum process indicates a closed political space, seemingly warranting concerns that were already voiced around the April 2010

elections. In many ways, the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) still behaves like a military movement and appears to struggle with handling political opposition and criticism more generally.

Secondly, among the population, expectations of what independence will bring are extremely high. This can be partly explained by a lack of information and communication on existing problems in South Sudan and their actual causes. In any scenario, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for South Sudan's leaders to live up to these expectations.

Thirdly, the measure of unity that was displayed during the interim period in South Sudan is not a true reflection of the actual unstable relations between different ethnic groups. Questions of power sharing and political accommodation emerged even before the week of polling in January had ended, and have been even more fiercely debated since, partly in the context of revising the constitution.

Fourthly, the fragmentation of South Sudanese society has been illustrated by the emergence of various armed opposition groups over the last few months, which have mostly organized themselves along tribal lines. Though these

groups are not necessarily a credible or legitimate bearer of this agenda, their accusations of corruption, tribal favoritism and authoritarianism on the part of the government do echo existing popular concerns.

Finally, most of the rebel groups that have surfaced since the referendum are, in fact, breakaway factions from the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), South Sudan's regular army. This raises questions about the loyalty of its troops and casts doubts on the short-term ability of the government to organize security.

## **THE ABYEI AND SOUTH KORDOFAN CRISES**

In the run-up to the enactment of South Sudan's independence, the security situation in the North-South border area deteriorated, particularly in Abyei and South Kordofan.

### ***Abyei***

Abyei was seized by the northern army in June 2011, after months of tensions. These tensions were partly caused by the indefinite postponement of a referendum in which the local population should have decided on whether Abyei would become part of either North or South Sudan. To some extent, this move by the government of North Sudan can be seen as strategic posturing that serves the objective of improving its position in ongoing negotiations with the South over post-referendum arrangements.

The agreement on Abyei, signed by the two parties in Addis Ababa on 20 June 2011, provides for a number of temporary administrative and security arrangements. Notably, the parties decided on the retrieval of their respective armies from the area and the subsequent deployment of an interim security force, authorized by the United Nations Security Council and consisting of 4200 Ethiopian troops.

If implemented, the Addis Ababa agreement would be a step forward. However, a sustainable solution for the Abyei crisis will require a political agreement on a number of sticky issues, including the ownership and use of fertile grazing lands. At present, an agreement of this nature is not in sight.

### ***South Kordofan***

South Kordofan descended into violent conflict in the wake of contested gubernatorial elections in May 2011. In an apparent strategy to neutralize a potential pocket of resistance in a strategic, oil-rich area, South Kordofan's Nuba population, which fought alongside the SPLA during the 1983-2005 civil war, became subjected to violent attacks and arbitrary arrests by northern forces.

The clashes have left over 173,000 Sudanese in South Kordofan and neighboring states in need for emergency aid. In the short term, a ceasefire to allow humanitarian assistance to access these affected communities should be a priority.

Ultimately, the problems in South Kordofan and other marginalized peripheral areas like Darfur, Blue Nile and East Sudan require steps to address existing political and socio-economic grievances. The CPA-mandated process of popular consultations in South Kordofan and Blue Nile has the objective of renegotiating the power and wealth sharing arrangements with the government of North Sudan. But these consultations appear insufficient as a mechanism to produce tangible results.

There are serious concerns over the role of UNMIS in both the Abyei and South Kordofan crises. Its reported inability to fulfill its mandate and offer even basic civilian protection has sparked fierce criticism. The accusations of inaction call for a thorough investigation into how the peacekeeping mission has performed its tasks during these crises.