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Sebastian Mariner, President

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The Situation In South Sudan

Security Council



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Introduction

In July of 2011, South Sudan emerged as the youngest nation in the world after decades of bloody conflict against its suppressor Sudan. This event carried widespread hopes for peace and prosperity in what was considered to be one of the most conflict driven zones in the world, let alone Africa, with the global stage having positive expectations for the world's newest country. However, these expectations were shattered following South Sudan's President, Salva Kiir, sacking multiple high ranking government officials, including the Vice President, based on accusations of a "plot" to undermine Kiir's presidential authority ahead of the national elections. This turn of events culminated into armed violence as Dinka troops (Kiir's ethnic group) took to the streets of the capital Juba and began killing Nuer (Vice President Machar's ethnic group) civilians, publicly executing and murdering over 20,000 innocent people, according to Nuer elders. Dubbed the Nuer Massacre, the violence against the Dinka and Nuer rapidly spread across the nation, starting the South Sudan civil war.

Despite the attempt to de-escalate the conflict in September 2018 with the signing of the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan, peace had not been achieved. The civil war only officially ended in February 2020, the two rival leaders coming together once more to form a unity government based on the aforementioned agreement. Since then, South Sudan has entered a period of unstable political tension, with the calm being interrupted by frequent attacks against the civilian population carried out by the military or insurgency groups. Delayed elections, dissolving of cabinet, and inconsequential reforms for South Sudan's security have all undermined any form of trust in the government, leading to the many issues South Sudan faces to be left unsolved. In rural areas in particular, where state authority is weak, local communities often fight based on ethnicity, extremist groups in particular target villages belonging to a certain ethnic group, pillaging and slaughtering its inhabitants based on a history of conflict between the Dinka and Nuer.

All in all, the situation in South Sudan is a complex web of factors, all being either regional, political, or agricultural. Whilst there are no "simple" solutions, the Security Council plays a central role in preventing any further escalation in the nation, as millions across the world are affected. This research report aims to not only educate, but assist delegates in formulating actionable solutions that concern one of the most pressing issues in the Security Council's agenda at HagaMUN XVI.

Definition of key terms

Armed Militia

An armed militia is a non-state affiliated, organised militarily equipped group that operates independent from government authority, mostly being formed of people with aligning political standing, religious beliefs, or ethnic group.

Ceasefire

A temporary or permanent agreement to end all fighting between conflicting parties

Civil War

An armed conflict occurring within a single nation, characterized by organized factions that challenge the central authority or engage in internal struggles for political dominance.

Ethnic Mobilisation

The method through which political or military entities mobilize backing based on ethnic divisions to further political or strategic aims.

Internally Displaced Person (IDP)

Individuals compelled to abandon their residences as a result of conflict, violence, or disasters, yet continue to reside within the border of their own nation.

Transitional Government

A temporary governmental body whose role is to function as the country's government whilst a political leader is assumed, often followed after conflict.

General Overview

The ongoing issue in South Sudan has been fueled by a multitude of key factors, the conflicts between political elites, the rapid militarisation by the government, and the disproportionate amount of armed power non-state affiliated groups maintain are some of the most major. Despite the official recognition of the Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity, the nation continues to face challenges such as ineffective governance, restricted territorial authority, and the persistent repercussions of militarized politics. Violence has not come to an end, rather, it has evolved. Instead of ongoing confrontations among major factions, we now observe instability taking the form of conflicts between communities, militia operations, targeted attacks on civilians, and violations perpetrated by both state and non-state armed entities.

The Government of South Sudan, led by President Salva Kiir, possesses formal authority but struggles with consistent governance throughout the nation. The South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF) are stationed in various areas to uphold order; however, their presence frequently falls short of ensuring sufficient protection for civilians. In numerous cases, SSPDF units and associated armed militia groups have partaken in arbitrary detentions, employed excessive force, and responded violently to local unrest. Such actions have diminished public confidence in state institutions and obscured the distinction between security measures and the oppression of the civilian populace.

Opposition groups continue to exert influence over the security landscape, despite their participation in the transitional government. The Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition (SPLM-IO), under the leadership of First Vice President Riek Machar, possesses armed factions that have not yet fully integrated with the national forces. In specific regions of Upper Nile and Unity states, SPLM-IO-aligned units maintain control, resulting in insecurity and localized confrontations.

Additionally, factions excluded from the peace agreement, particularly the National Salvation Front (NAS), are engaged in persistent low-intensity armed conflicts, which include assaults on security personnel and obstructing humanitarian initiatives, especially in Central Equatoria. Intercommunal violence poses a significant threat to the stability of contemporary South Sudan. In Jonglei State, the Greater Pibor Administrative Area, Warrap, and Lakes State, armed youth groups and community defense forces frequently partake in cattle raiding, retaliatory attacks, and territorial disputes. These confrontations are typically fueled by ethnic rivalries, competition for land and water resources, and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Although this violence is often perceived as localized, national political figures have been accused of exploiting these tensions for their own strategic interests, complicating the resolution of these conflicts.

Although terrorism is not officially recognized as a factor in the situation in South Sudan, the violent actions executed by various armed factions increasingly mirror strategies intended to instill fear and exert control over the local populace. In numerous areas, there have been intentional attacks on villages, instances of abduction, methods of intimidation,

and enforced relocations designed to showcase dominance or penalize communities perceived as disloyal. These occurrences persist, despite the ongoing ceasefire agreements established under the renewed peace accord. While significant clashes between the primary factions have largely diminished, localized violence remains prevalent and lacks effective addressing, resulting in a perpetual state of low-level insecurity and an amplified sense of fear, especially in rural regions where government presence is minimal.

At the heart of this enduring insecurity lies the unresolved division within South Sudan's security framework. The inability to unify and professionalize the armed forces has led to multiple command structures, inconsistent discipline, and varied conduct during security operations. As a result, civilians frequently endure intimidation, arbitrary detentions, and violent reprisals from both state-affiliated forces and armed groups. These circumstances have caused repeated displacements and exacerbated food insecurity, as conflict, flooding, and economic hardships continue to jeopardize livelihoods. Concurrently, humanitarian organizations are encountering increasing difficulties, such as insecurity along supply routes, interference from armed factions, and bureaucratic hurdles imposed by authorities, which significantly impede the effectiveness of aid distribution.

Major parties involved

Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)

The IGAD is a regional body situated in East Africa, with its main goal being to facilitate and advance the peace process in South Sudan. It has led multiple negotiations, one notable one being the revitalized peace agreement between Kiir and Machar, consistently promoting dialogue between political figures.

National Salvation Front (NAS)

Led by Thomas Cirillo, the armed group known as the National Salvation Front is primarily opposed to the central government, operating similarly as an insurgency group. The NAS is largely located in Central Equatoria and has on numerous occasions engaged in short low-intensity clashes with government forces. It claims to be a resistance organization opposing political marginalization; however, it has been criticized for obstructing humanitarian assistance and exacerbating the current insecurity in South Sudan.

Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity (RTGoNU)

Serving as South Sudan's transitional government as the nation undergoes elections, it is currently spearheaded by President Salva Kiir with First Vice President Riek Machar. Its primary responsibility is to oversee the political transition and implement any reforms necessary. Despite this, its effectiveness continues to be undermined as political deadlock persists and limited control over its armed forces impede any effective use of authority.

Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition (SPLM-IO)

The main opposition and signatory to the transitional peace agreement, its leader Riek Machar participates in the RTGoNU despite armed forces aligned with the SPLM-IO remaining partially outside any command structure in the current government, contributing to insecurity and local clashes between separatists.

United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)

UNMISS represents the United Nations' peacekeeping initiative, which is responsible for protecting civilians, facilitating the peace process, and supporting humanitarian activities. It ensures the safety of civilian regions, conducts patrols in areas with high risks, and monitors human rights abuses. While it has successfully prevented mass atrocities in some instances, its operations are constrained by resource availability, geographical factors, and regulations established by national governments.

Timeline of events

2011 July 9th South Sudan officially becomes independent from Sudan after a referendum overwhelmingly voting in favour, thus becoming the world's newest sovereign state.

2013 December 15th Violence by Dinka forces after political tensions between Kiir and Machar escalated, with Dinka soldiers executing thousands of Nuer civilians, marking the start of the South Sudan civil war.

2018 September 12th The Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan is signed, officially bringing an end to large-scale hostilities.

2020 February 22nd The Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity (RTGoNU) is established as a result of the peace agreement being put into effect.

2021 August 2nd The transitional period has been officially prolonged as essential goals, including elections and security reforms, have not yet been achieved.

2023 December 18th Intercommunal violence is on the rise in Jonglei and the Greater Pibor Administrative Area, forcing tens of thousands to leave their homes.

2025 September 1st The RTGoNU announces additional delays for national elections due to ongoing insecurity and a political deadlock.

Relevant UN treaties and events

S/RES/2155: The establishment of UNMISS by the Security Council and its mandate for civilian protection. *15 May 2014*

S/RES/2625: Emphasises the protection of civilians in UNMISS and renews its mandate once more. *15 March 2022*

UN Arms Embargo on South Sudan: Since 2018, the UN has imposed restrictions on the transfer of weapons to South Sudan in order to limit the violence occurring, with it being renewed for another year in 2025. *30 May 2025*

Previous attempts to solve the issue

Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict (R-ARCSS)

The renewed peace agreement, which was signed in September 2018, sought to end widespread violence by establishing power-sharing arrangements, enforcing security measures, and detailing a plan for moving towards elections. Although it has succeeded in decreasing hostilities across the country and aiding in the formation of the RTGoNU, the execution of this accord has been slow and inconsistent. Key elements, including the reform of the security sector and the development of a new constitution, are still unfinished, leading to persistent insecurity and political stalemate, despite the formal structure of the agreement being established.

Regional mediation through IGAD

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has been instrumental in promoting dialogue between the factions in South Sudan and ensuring regional involvement. IGAD's efforts in mediation have led to ceasefires and a renewed peace agreement. However, ongoing conflicts among member states and insufficient enforcement measures have limited its capacity to ensure compliance, leading to ongoing violations and hindrances in reform efforts.

Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS)

The initial peace accord, which was signed in August 2015, sought to bring an end to the civil war by creating a power-sharing government involving Salva Kiir and Riek Machar, establishing a permanent ceasefire, and initiating reforms in governance and the security sector. While it initially succeeded in reducing violence and facilitated Machar's return to Juba, the agreement ultimately disintegrated in 2016 due to renewed hostilities, highlighting the vulnerability of elite-driven settlements and the absence of effective enforcement mechanisms.

Possible solutions

Accelerating security sector reform

The Security Council could endorse stronger initiatives focused on unifying and professionalizing South Sudan's armed forces by tying international aid to clear progress in security sector reform. This approach would require the elimination of parallel command structures, enhancement of discipline, and greater civilian oversight. A revamped security sector would help minimize abuses against civilians and bolster the state's ability to tackle localized violence.

Improving civilian protection and humanitarian access

Humanitarian aid remains paramount in ensuring civilian safety in insecure zones such as South Sudan, with enhanced coordination between the RTGoNU and UNMISS could improve aid delivery and the protection of civilians. This could involve enhancing early-warning systems, ensuring the safety of humanitarian corridors, and tackling bureaucratic obstacles. Better access would enable aid to reach at-risk communities more efficiently, while also diminishing the likelihood of violence associated with competition for limited resources.

Enhancing regional and international coordination

Enhanced collaboration among the United Nations, IGAD, the African Union, and significant bilateral partners has the potential to intensify pressure on the leaders of South Sudan to enact necessary reforms. By harmonizing diplomatic communications, sanctions strategies, and incentives, the chances for political figures to take advantage of rifts among external stakeholders would be diminished. A cohesive international strategy could amplify influence and facilitate more uniform advancement towards stability.

Advancing the electoral and constitutional process

Global entities may offer both technical and financial support to facilitate the drafting of constitutions and the preparation of credible elections. Assisting independent electoral bodies, enhancing voter registration processes, and promoting civic education would contribute to alleviating political stagnation and bolstering public trust in the transition. Although elections pose risks in unstable environments, ongoing delays only serve to erode legitimacy and extend periods of uncertainty.

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