

Promoting Physical and Human Security

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Since I have been asked to speak on human security following a peace agreement between the government of Sudan (GoS) and the opposition Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army (SPLA), especially on the issues that stand out as potential peace spoilers, I will start my presentation with two observations that might speak experientially about the problems that would be faced regarding the implementation of the agreement. The first was an event I witnessed when I was in a small village of Maluakon in northern Bahr-el-Ghazal, South Sudan in June of 2003. On a warm June day, General Lazarous K. Sumbeiywo, the Kenyan chief mediator in the Sudanese peace talks, arrived in Maluakon on a journey that had taken him to different part of Sudan. His trips were intended to provide the opportunity of engaging ordinary Sudanese people regarding the peace deal being hammered out in Kenya. General Sumbeiywo was coming from northern Sudan where he had held meetings with various groups, and wanted to do likewise in the South.

On the occasion of his arrival in Maluakon, various sectors of the Dinka population in the area, including the army, civil service, school children, women's groups, youth representatives, and the traditional administration, all gathered at the airfield to receive him. He immediately held a public meeting with all these people explaining to them that he did not come to give a speech, but rather "to listen to your concerns regarding the peace process." He declared that "I would like you to tell me what issues you would like to see highlighted at the negotiations, and what your ideal outcome of the talks would be." Everyone was overjoyed at this opportunity, and for a moment, it seemed like the opportunity they had all been waiting for. They gave first chances to representatives of the different groups in attendance. The acting commissioner of the county spoke, then the women's representative, then a teacher, a youth representative, and traditional chiefs spoke last, one after the other. One particular speech, which received a standing ovation was the one given by Chief Makuac Kuol Makuac, who said the following: "Your Excellency, I need to point out first the differences you may have already noticed between northern Sudan and the South. When you were in the north, they may have welcomed you in a nice cool house, possibly with air conditioner and cushioned seats, as opposed accommodating you under a tree as we are doing now, a sign of economic disparities between two sides of the country. You may have also noticed that their names in the north were Muhammed, Ali, Osman etc; whereas our names here are Deng, Akol, Lual etc., a sign of marked cultural differences. Even the environment says that much about our differences. You saw dessert in the north, and now you see a tropical environment. Your Excellency, these people are not one with us. They are constantly out to kill us, to exterminate us. We have the signs of their ill intentions all over our land; and if you were staying here for longer than two hours, we would have gone a short distance to bring to you Dinka women whose breasts have been chopped off during Arab raids, we would have shown you people who have been maimed by high-flying bombers or

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helicopter gun-ships, or we would have taken you to some villages nearby that have been burnt to the ground year after year by militia trained and armed by this very government that you are trying to reconcile us with. These are not our brothers, sir. Someone who does such things to you cannot be a brother. What we ask of you is that you acknowledge the differences between north and south and that we do not have historical oneness with them. We in the villages do not even understand how we are connected other than the fact that we the north claims to be the government, a government that goes out of its way to hurt people instead of help people. If you were to find a lasting solution to this killing and misery, it is best you consider a possibility of the two sides parting ways. This is the only solution in my view. Everything else has been tried over the last fifty year to no avail. I ask you to have John Garang [SPLA leader] hold one end of this country, Bashir [the president of Sudan] hold the other end, and you cut it in the middle with scissors. That will end the tragedy once and for all. As for our neighbors, the Baggara, we can always arrange the means to share the resources of the Kiir River on the bases of neighborhood, friendship and understanding, as we have done since time immemorial.”

This speech speaks loudly about the fragility of north-south relations. It talks about the depth of the wounds that this war is about to leave behind, and the necessity of addressing them in the peace process so as to give the Dinka, Nuer, and Shilluk populations that share the border with the Arabs a sense that not only will security return to their homelands, but also that accountability for these crimes will be established and justice restored.

My second story is an historical observation. When a peace deal was reached in 1972 in Addis Ababa between Nemeiri’s government and the southern opposition army at the time (the Southern Sudan Liberation Movement), one of the tricks used to attain a quick agreement was to sweep under the carpet all of the atrocities, war crimes, and crimes against humanity committed during the war to prevent the peace negotiations from getting bogged down on issues of seeking justice for the victims of the 17-year long war. It was argued that focusing on such issues would only derail the negotiations. So the best solution was to try to forget these crimes and violations and focus on reconciliation. Well, as it became obvious soon afterwards, people hardly forget these crimes. Instead, they most likely try to avenge their loved ones and destroyed property. In other words, wishing the problems away does not build peace. It only serves as a spoiler of peace. This issue became one of the main reasons why Sudan was back at war after a short hiatus of ten years. After all, war is not remembered in terms of victory or defeat. It is remembered by individuals and families based on the kinds of experiences they have had during the war.

In the current peace talks, it seems that history is about to repeat itself. More war crimes and crimes against humanity, as the first story shows, have been committed during the current round of the war than the previous round, especially by the government and its militias. While everyone is caught in the hoopla of peace deal being around the corner, the parties to the conflict are working on writing off the atrocities as things that should not be revisited, lest they take away the focus that should be concentrated on reaching a deal quickly. And the negotiations seem to be avoiding the writing of a mechanism of

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justice restoration into the eventual agreement. It is understandable that parties to the war might not agree to the establishment of a system that might come to haunt them. The dilemma that the mediators face in this regard is quite real. If they push the issue of war crimes tribunal following a peace deal, they might not achieve peace; and if they avoid them in order to safe guard the peace process, they risk overlooking the question of justice for war victims. One thing is clear, however. There cannot be an illusion that bringing a peace deal that does not address the issues or restoration of justice is bound to rack that peace accord.

For example, the issue of slave raiding that has gone on for over two decade since the beginning of this round of war remains a soaring wound on the north-south relations, and it is bound to remain so during peace times, possibly waiting for one powerful event to trigger either revenge by the Dinka upon the Baggara, or the Baggara reverting to their old ways. A peace deal that does not address this issue is one that has no regard for human security and cannot be guaranteed to last long.

There is also the question of the denial of food to war victims as a weapon of war. This has been pointed out many times by human rights organizations, the UN and foreign governments. This has led to the death of hundreds of thousands of people in the South, in the Darfur region and in Kordofan, and the responsibility for lost of these lives lies squarely with the government. Sure, something has to be done to account for this tragedy, if only to enable the people of these regions to trust the government in a post-war Sudan.

In the south, the most pressing issue is the question of militias in Upper Nile and the militarization of ethnic identity. These groups of armed men are sponsored by the government of Sudan for the sole purpose of racking any southern unity. If the SPLA does not speed up the process of reconciliation with these groups so that they are brought into the fold before the final agreement is signed, they will most likely become a threat to peace, not only within the South, but also the viability of the whole process of referendum on self-determination.

It must also be kept in mind that a protracted conflict such as this leads to a phenomenon of reproduction of violence within communities and families. Staggering statistics of rape and sexual abuse that both government and opposition armies are accused of are quite important in its own right, but a sinister development to reckon with is the fact that years of conditioning of youth to violence have led to a growing use of violence domestically. Now, with peace on the horizon and no plans being made to deal with the large number of soldiers who will be demobilized without proper preparation for civilian lives, the situation is likely to be one of total insecurity, especially for women. This is something that the SPLA must be aware of, and would be expected to embark on plans to remedy it long before a peace agreement is signed.

During the negotiations, parties to the conflict have to be conscious of the long history of mistrust that has developed not only between the armies, but also between the populations of different parts of the country. To reconcile this mistrust, they have to pay attention to the power of symbols and symbolism. The question of Shari'a in Khartoum

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and the way non-Muslims have been treated will continue to give southerners a feeling of insecurity in what is supposedly their own country. Other symbols include the use of Islamic colors such as the color of the passport cover, or the names given to things and places such the river that Arabs call Bahr-el-Arab and Dinka call Kiir. The use of these terms or application of these colors may not have any ill intentions behind them, but they are usually read differently by different people. It is important to look for neutral symbols if all the citizens of Sudan are to feel at home in every corner of the country.

My point is that waiting for a comprehensive agreement before dealing with these issues is a mistake. Mechanism for dealing with all the above questions need to built into the agreement if human security is be maintained and every citizen is to immediately experience peace dividends.