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Weak State Syndrome and Civil War in South Sudan

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Abstract

South Sudan is the youngest state in Africa and, indeed, the world. It was created out of Sudan through a referendum on July 9 2011. With a total of 619,745 square kilometres land size, much of which is quite fertile for food production, a population of eleven million people and with the third largest oil reserves in Sub-Saharan Africa, one expected the new leaders of the country to employ this trinity of natural sources of power for rapid economic growth and development. But this is not to be. Instead, in December 2013 a political power struggle broke out between President Sylva Kiir and his ex-vice President Rich Machar, which degenerated into a Civil War. So far, the war has resulted in the dead of 10,000 people, 1,000,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) inside South Sudan and about 400,000 citizens who have fled to neighbouring countries, particularly Sudan, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Kenya and Uganda. This is a tragedy of immense proportion in a country that at independence was one of the poorest in the world with little infrastructure and few social structures. This paper uses the state-making theories to examine the state-building processes in South Sudan and particularly the triggers of conflicts, crises and Civil War. It is observed that the challenges of South Sudan revolve around the issues of the weak state syndrome which in turn triggers its Civil War.

Introduction

The Republic of South Sudan gained independence from Sudan on July 9 2011. Until that date South Sudan was effectively a part of Sudan. But since the years of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium the territory that today forms the Republic of South Sudan was not properly integrated with its northern part that is today the Republic of Sudan. What complicated matter was that the northern part of Sudan was mainly Islamic, while the southern part was mainly Christian and animist. Together with a curious ethnic composition that

owed allegiance to ethnic leaders instead of the nation, Sudan was a case of political instability. Even at that Sudan was developing at a faster rate on account of oil. The country began exporting crude oil in 1999 and in the last quarter of 1999 it recorded its first trade surplus. Increased oil production of about 520,000 barrels per day revived light industry, and expanded export processing zones helped to sustain gross domestic product (GDP) growth at 6.1 percent in 2003. With rising oil revenues, the Sudanese economy was booming with a growth rate of about a percent in 2007. In 2010, Sudan was considered the 17-th fastest-growing economy in the world and there was rapid development of the country largely from oil profits even at the time it faced international sanctions. But in 2011 Sudan was dismembered into Sudan and South Sudan. In the new reality, South Sudan inherited about 80 per cent of oil wells and reverses such that it has the third - largest oil reserves in sub-Saharan Africa.

Given this scenario, the general expectation is that South Sudan will develop rapidly with oil as the main instrument of economic growth and development but this is not to be. Rather South Sudan is experiencing series of conflicts and civil war. Fundamentally, there are many casual factors for conflicts and civil war in South Sudan. Since gaining independence in 2011, the country has been one of the world's poorest and underdeveloped nations, with little infrastructure and few hospitals, there is the case of ethnic conflicts, low state capacity and leadership crisis.

Characteristics of Weak State Syndrome

There is no doubt that the strengths of states in the international system are ranked based largely on the structural conditions of their existence. Following from this, one can broadly talk of two ranks of states, namely: strong states and weak states.

In order to capture the essence of weak states, there is need to discuss few characteristics of strong states. According to Dauvergne strong states have the capacity to:

maintain social control, ensure societal compliance with official laws, act decisively, make

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effective policies, preserve stability and cohesion, encourage societal participation in state institutions, provide basic services, manage and control the national economy and retain legitimacy¹.

On the values of high levels of socio-political cohesion, J. Migdal adds that strong states exist as a hegemonic idea which is accepted and naturalized in the minds of the citizens. To this extent strong states, in his words, will “consider the state as natural as the landscape around them; they cannot imagine their lives without it.”² Defining state strength further in terms capacity, Migdal adds that it is “the ability of state leaders to use the agencies of the state to get people in the state to do what they want them to do”³. For R I Rotberg⁴ strong states are marked by their capacity to control their territories and provide high standard of living for the citizens. Of course, there are other features of strong states as documented by Rotberg. These concern the fact that strong states perform well according to standard indicators like the per capita GDP, the United Nations Human Development Index, Freedom House’s Freedom in the World Report and the Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index. The third point is that strong states provide a high level of security against deviants and social actors in order to ensure political freedom and civil liberties and create an environment conducive to economic development. Lastly, Rotberg contends that strong states are ideal regions of peace and stability.⁵

Of these characteristics of state strength, Richard Jackson⁶ argues that three are most important. The three are:

1. Infrastructural capacity in terms of the ability of state institutions to perform essential tasks and enact policy;
2. Coercive capacity in terms of the state’s ability and willingness to employ force against challenges to its authority; and

3. National identity and social cohesion in terms of the degree to which the population identifies with the nation-state and accepts its legitimate role in their lives.

With the knowledge of the characteristics of strong states, it is rather easy to attempt the features of weak states. Interestingly, the features are mere contrast of the ones for strong states. However, the key indicators of weak states as provided by R I Rotberg⁷ are:

- Rise in criminality and political violence
- Loss of control over borders
- Rising ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural hostilities
- Civil war
- Use of terror against their own citizens
- Weak institutions
- Deteriorated or insufficient infrastructure
- Inability to collect taxes without undue coercion
- High levels of corruption
- Collapsed health system
- Rising levels of infant mortality and declining life expectancy
- End of regular schooling opportunities
- Declining levels of GDP per capita GDP
- Escalating inflation
- Widespread preference for foreign currencies
- Basic food shortages leading to starvation
- Rising attacks on fundamental legitimacy
- Rulers working exclusively for themselves
- Key interests groups showing less and less loyalty to the state
- People’s sense of political community weakens and citizens feel disenfranchised and marginalised
- Social contract between the people and the state is ruptured and forfeited
- Animosity becomes the order of life

In his seminal work ***Regime Security***, Richard Jackson contends that weak states display all or a number of the following characteristics:

Institutional weakness and an inability to enact national policy or perform basic state function such as tax collection and providing law and order; political instability, as evidenced by coups, plots, rebellions and frequent violent changes of government; the centralization of political power in a single individual or small elite who command the machinery of government to run the state in their own interest; unconsolidated or non-existent democracies; ongoing economic crisis and structural weakness; external vulnerability to inter-national actors and forces; intense societal divisions along class, religious, regional, urban-rural and/or ethnic lines; lack of a cohesive or strong sense of national identity; and ongoing crisis of legitimate for both of state in general.⁸

So far, it can be deduced that weak states advertise zones of tension, danger, risk and crises or wars. These negative tendencies persist because in most cases weak states share sovereignties with social and marginalized actors who are violence entrepreneurs. Arguing in this direction, Richard Jackson notes thus:

The most important characteristic of weak states is their frequent inability to establish and maintain a monopoly on the instruments of violence. Even in states with well-developed coercive power, civilian governments do not always retain the absolute loyalty of the armed forces and face a constant threat of military intervention. For most weak states, however, the armed forces are ill-equipped, poorly managed and prone to factional divisions. At the same time, a range of social actors-rival politicians with their own private armies, warlords, criminal gangs, locally organized militias, armed and organized ethnic or religious groups and private security companies or mercenaries-are powerful enough to resist the state's attempt to enforce compliance. In such a situation, even the most minimal requirement of statehood-the monopoly on the instruments of violence-is largely out of reach.⁹

Given the characteristics of weak states as already examined, one tends to see them as burdens of development in the Third World Countries. This is so because the indicators for weak state syndrome are almost the same indicators for underdevelopment. This may explain the reason that many weak states are found in the Southern Hemisphere. For one, this is a clear zone of poverty and underdevelopment.

Be that as it may, one needs to examine the evolution of South Sudan in order to come to terms with the particulars of its civil war and the role of weak state syndrome in the war.

Wars and the Evolution of the Republic of South Sudan

Essentially, the beginning of modern Sudan can be traced to the 1821 Turco-Egyptian invasion. During the Turco-Egyptian rulership of Sudan at least three legacies that caused permanent division between the north (today's Sudan) and the South (today's Southern Sudan) occurred. First, the economy during the Turco-Egyptian administration imposed heavy taxation on the South. Second, the population of the South was heavily decimated through slave trade. Third, while the Nile Valley was comparatively developed, other areas were neglected. They became in the words of Andrew S Natsios "a resource to be exploited rather than a region to be developed."¹⁰ Therefore, before Sudan had independence the region that later became Southern Sudan was thoroughly neglected.

The Turco-Egyptian rule marked the first period of modern Sudan's history. It lasted between 1821 and 1881. The second period of the history of modern Sudan was marked by the Mahdiya influence which sought to control all of Sudan, including today's South Sudan, through manipulation, repression and conquest. Though it failed, later Mahdists attempted to continue with the Islamization and Arabization of the South.

The second period of modern Sudan's history lasted between 1882 and 1898. The third period of Sudan's history was marked by the rule of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium. This period started in 1898 and ended in 1956 with the independence of Sudan. It was a period of British influence in

the affairs of Sudan even though it was occasioned by joint rule by British and Egyptian officials.

A noticeable issue in this period was the aspiration of Sudanese for political independence. While some Sudanese wanted to continue relationship with Egypt through merger, many especially of the Mahdist bent wanted complete independence from Egypt.

Another issue that confronted the nationalist in Sudan was the status of the South. The South was not prepared for independence and never wanted it. The few who wanted it desired to be incorporated into the political system of independent Sudan.

The third issue concerned religion. The non-Muslims in the South demanded, alongside Communists, Socialists and Secularists in the North, for a secular state but majority who, in any case, were Muslims opted for an exclusively Islamic State.

Since independence these three issues haunted the Sudanese government. Attempts at solution came only with the Comprehensive Peace agreement (CPA) signed in January 2005 and the referendum for southern independence held in January 2011, which resulted in the dismemberment of Sudan.

Fundamentally, even before Sudan achieved independence from Britain, sparks of wars were created in Southern Sudan. These had to do with large scale violence that was visited on the South by the North and the responses of the people of the South to these attempts at pogrom. Indeed, since independence the succeeding governments at Khartoum had been pre-occupied with the various blueprints to solve what later came to be called the "Southern Problem". In attempting to resolve the southern problem, these governments, which, in any case, were manned by northerners pursued the same policy of Arabization and Islamization.

It is interesting to note that over the years the people of the South had been resisting the attack and invasion from the north at great cost through voluntary efforts but by 1964 the South formed a military organization called Anyanya to promote southern insurgency in Sudan. The group found its leader in the person of Joseph Lagu. By 1969 Lagu and other insurgent commanders travelled to Israel for training. The Israeli support changed for good the colouration of the

insurgency and gave Anyanya a balanced military platform to resist the Khartoum government.

From the period of the emergence Anyanya in the political evolution of Sudan, its history until 2011 was marked by wars, bloodshed, famine, and the creation of refugees. Indeed, the wars are couched conveniently in two periodizations: the First Civil War and the Second Civil War. The First Civil War started in 1955 on the eve of independence of Sudan and ended in 1972. The Second Sudanese Civil War started in 1983 and ended in 2005, thus becoming the longest civil war in Africa.

The two civil wars killed more than 3 million people and led to the destruction of infrastructural facilities in Southern Sudan. Apart from the fact that the Khartoum government introduced the scorch-earth policy of destroying everything in sight in South Sudan, it also encouraged the emergence of more than seventy militia groups which it funded to engage in inter-group genocide. Indeed, as a result of the infighting more people from South Sudan died at each other's hands than were killed by the Khartoum - inspired bullets. Andrew S. Natsios captures succinctly the scale of these atrocities in the following words:

While the Numayri, Sadiq, and Bashir governments were directly responsible for hundreds of thousands of deaths in the South during the Second Civil war, it was southerners killing southerners that took the largest number of lives. Successive Khartoum governments knew how to exploit the traditional southern tribal rivalries. Over the course of two decades, the North armed, equipped, and funded as many as seventy southern militias to attack the SPLA, which was seen in many areas as a Dinka-dominated army. The Dinkas had many enemies in the South, particularly the Nuer, the second largest tribe. The Dinka and Nuer killed each other and burnt each other's villages using northern weapons and equipment. The worst atrocities of the war took place after the split within the SPLA in the early 1990s. The North also supported, armed, and equipped the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda, which was carrying on an insurgency against the Museveni government and maintained a

permanent military base in the Kit Valley. Terrible atrocities during the Second Civil War were committed by the LRA in their periodic incursions into southern Sudan - incursions that remained a serious security problem in the South in 2011.¹¹

There is no doubt that such atrocities strengthened the resolve of the people of the South to wish for a separate country of their own.

It is interesting to note that beginning from 1998 the military position of the Khartoum government had been so weakened that it began to choose the option of peace approach instead of continuous military approach which until now never worked. By the 2001 rapprochement between John Garang of the Dinka ethnic group and Riak Machar of the Nuer ethnic group, the north came to the conclusion that it could no longer play one ethnic group in the South against another. The rapprochement facilitated the processes of peace between the north and the south which culminated in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005 and the dismemberment of Sudan in 2011.

Though the CPA was initialled in 2005 by the representatives of the Khartoum government and those of Southern Sudan, the negotiations started in June 2002. The main aims of the CPA were to end the Second Civil War and create the platform for the development of unified Sudan. But as it turned out to be, the CPA facilitated the disintegration of the state of Sudan.

The CPA had six protocols concluded between 2002 and 2005. These six protocols provided for, among other things, the following:

- A six-year interim period at the end of which, the people of Southern Sudan were given the right to vote in a self-determination referendum to decide whether to remain united with Sudan or to secede.
- A cessation of hostilities between the SPLA and the SAF, and the maintenance of SPLA forces in the South and the SAF forces in the north.
- The establishment of a secular, semi-autonomous Southern Sudan with its own executive, legislative and judicial institutions.

- Power sharing arrangements between Sudan's two major political parties, the SPLM and NCP, as well as smaller parties, at the national and southern Sudan levels of government.
- Wealth sharing arrangements whereby, among other things, profits from oil extracted in Southern Sudan were split 50-50 between the national and Southern Sudan levels of government.
- Democratic elections to occur during the Interim Period.
- The establishment of a special administrative status for the disputed Abiyei area, as well as a referendum for the "residents" of Abiyei, to be carried out at the same time as Southern Sudan referendum.

On the basis of the CPA, the people of Southern Sudan voted in the Southern Sudan referendum on January 9 2011. In the referendum about 99 percent of the voters opted for independence from the Republic of Sudan. On the basis of the results, on July 9 2011 the interim period came to an end and South Sudan became the world's youngest nation under the name of the Republic of South Sudan. On July 14 2011 the new Republic became the 193rd member state of the United Nations and July 28 2011 it became the 54th member state of the African Union. All in all, Sudan Sudan became an independent state through bloodshed and years of civil wars.

The years of political miscalculations of the Republic of Sudan that ultimately led to its dismemberment are captured clearly in the following historical factors by Douglas Johnson.¹²

- 1) Patterns of governance which developed in the Sudanic states before the nineteenth century, establishing an exploitive relationship between the centralizing power of the state and its hinterlands peripheries, mainly through the institutions of slavery and slave raiding, creating groups of peoples with a lastingly ambiguous status in relation to the state;
- 2) The introduction of a particular brand of militant Islam in the late nineteenth century which further sharpened the divide between persons with and without full legal rights within the state;

- 3) Inequalities in economic, educational and political development within the colonial state of the twentieth century, which often built upon earlier patterns;
- 4) British's decision, based on political expediency, to grant independence in 1956 to the whole of the Sudan before disparities in development could be addressed, and without obtaining adequate guarantees for safeguarding the interests and representation of southern Sudanese;
- 5) A narrowly-based nationalist movement among the northern élite in the Sudan which confronted the issues of the Sudan's diversity and unequal development by attempting to build a national identity based on the principles of Arab culture and the religion of Islam, leading to the re-emergence of nineteenth-century ideas of governance in centre-periphery relations;
- 6) Failure to obtain a national consensus in either the North or the South in the 1970s concerning national unity, regional development, and the balance of power between the central and regional governments;
- 7) The weakened state of the Sudan's economy in the 1970s, coinciding with a Southern awareness of the extent of their own natural resources, that hastened political instability in the 1980s;
- 8) The Sudan's involvement in the international politics of the Cold War, which exacerbated its own internal war, especially through the distribution of arms on an unprecedented scale;
- 9) The re-emergence of militant Islam as a major political and economic force, both nationally and internationally, and the qualifications this has placed on the rights of non-Muslim citizens;
- 10) The interest of foreign governments foreign investors in the Sudan's natural and mineral resources, especially water and oil.

Weak State Syndrome as Trigger of Civil War in South Sudan

At independence, the territory of Republic of South Sudan was quite devastated. Apart from high illiteracy rates, there were cases of lack of sufficient infrastructure and

absence of institutional capacity to drive the processes of development. Indeed, the character of the new state fitted into the Rotberg indicators of weak states as outlined in the paper. The expectation was that having secured the age-long desire for independence, the state and its citizens ought to have mobilized themselves, even with available resources and international goodwill, to develop above average possibilities. But as if civil wars were **Will** from Sudan to South Sudan, the Republic of South Sudan started the process of implementing the **Will** through home-grown civil war.

Though legacies of Sudan, all of the Rotberg indicators contributed to the outbreak of the civil war in South Sudan. However, the greatest factor was ethnic struggle for prominence and political positions in the scheme of things in the new Republic. In terms of ethnic composition, there are about five ethnic groups some of which are the Dinka, the Nuer, the Bari, the Azande and the Shilluk. Of the about 12 million people in excess of 1 million and constitute about 15 percent of the population. They are closely followed by the Nuer at approximately 10 percent. Followed in that order are the Bari and Azande. Of the groups, the Shilluk is fairly related to both the Dinka and the Nuer in their language.

At independence, Salve Kiir, a Dinka was sworn in as the President of South Sudan. He needed to be highly skillful and shrewd in the management of state affairs. But he lacked the capacity and allowed the traditional Dinka-Nuer rivalry to rear its ugly head. The deterioration of relations between these two major groups led to accusations of coup attempt levelled against former Vice President Riek Machar, a Nuer on December 14 2015. As a result the Nuer faction of the SPLA loyal to Machar ignited the South Sudan Civil War. Though Riek Machar denied the allegations he fled the country but inspired the Nuer people to fight the central government of President Kiir. The civil war led to the killing of more than 300,000 civilians and the creation of about 1,000,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) inside South Sudan and about 400,000 refugees in the neighbouring countries of Kenya, Sudan, Ethiopia and Uganda.

Though the first ceasefire agreement was reached in January 2014, war still continued. It took high levels of negotiations initiated by Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to reach a comprehensive ceasefire agreement in August 2015 known as the Compromise Peace

Agreement. The International Organizations and nations that took part in the negotiations were the African Union, the United Nations, the European Union, the United States of America, United Kingdom and Norway. On account of participation of many organizations and nations in the mediation, the Agreement is at times called IGAD+; that is, IGAD PLUS.

On the basis of IGAD+ and or the Compromise Peace Agreement Reik Machar returned to South Sudan and was sworn in as Vice President of the country in April 2016. This at ended, at least theoretically, the civil war in South Sudan.

Endnotes

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