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## Consequences of the Secession of Southern Sudan on the Region

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### **Introduction**

On 15 January 2011, the people of southern Sudan voted by an overwhelming majority of 98.6 per cent in favour of secession from the united Sudan. The referendum on self-determination was a condition in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which was signed between the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), the major rebel group in southern Sudan, and the ruling National Congress Party (NCP), at Naivasha, Kenya, in January 2005. The CPA was not as inclusive as it should be; it excluded the major political powers in northern Sudan and significant parties in the south. It gave the two warring parties full domination over the country, SPLM in the south and NCP in the north; they were in a position to determine the future of the Sudan after a six-year interim period without a popular mandate.

The promise to make unity attractive as stipulated in the CPA became unattainable in the neglected conditions of democratic transformation, government of real national unity and genuine partnership between the two parties during the interim period. Under such environment, it is not possible to provide political solutions for the problems of the whole country or neither its two regions, north and south. It is more likely to complicate and aggravate the situation which will lead to a tense and incriminatory relationship between the two emerging states and their internal politics. The dire situation will have

its negative impact on neighbouring countries and the region at large, because secession is bound to influence ethnic communities in the region. Forecasting the future at this stage may not be easy, but policies of the two governments and some news reports in each country indicate alarming consequences.

### **Is Secession a Viable Solution?**

According to Braizat (2011), secession of the south raises the question about the effectiveness of the policies pursued by successive Sudanese governments in the field of social integration; policies which, according to the result of the referendum (January 2011), led the southern Sudanese to opt for secession by an overwhelming majority. Sudanese governments failed to base unity of the country on common citizenship in which everyone enjoyed equality regardless of his ethnic, linguistic or cultural affiliations. To Al afif (2010), northern Sudan, identifying itself with Arabism and Islam as encompassing the whole country, excluded and resisted any reference to Sudan as part of Africa. Naturally southern Sudanese refused such tendency.

It is a sad experience that the Sudanese people failed to achieve unity, to build a state of justice, equality and devolution of powers to marginalised regions in the peripheries. They failed to foster an inclusive political system and to manage the complex diversity of the country in an equitable manner. No wonder, secession became an obvious outcome of the poor political behaviour of the ruling elite since independence in 1956 till the referendum in January 2011. The problem of the Sudan is not only in the south, it is the problem of all remote regions versus the centre which monopolises power and wealth, and creates its own elite that dominates political and economic institutions excluding the rest in the far regions. That explains the conflicts and rebellions in Darfur, southern Kordofan, Blue Nile and eastern Sudan. A viable and sustainable solution to the problems of Sudan cannot be found in a prolonged negotiation ending in peace agreements with some factions leaving others; it can only be achieved through a radical change in the structure and policies of the centre towards inclusive participation, plural democracy and social justice.

It is unfortunate that the south, fed up with a prolonged war and failed promises, decided to seize the available chance to sign a separate peace agreement with the government, retreating to its regional territory, trying to tackle its own problems regardless of what happens to its former allies in the north. Southern Sudanese may not be blamed or denied their rights for a separate state, but the problem of Sudan is not yet solved, nor that of the south. If the method of self-determination is implemented in other cases, the old

Sudan will end up in five or more states. The south itself will not be immune to conflicts and divisions, because of its multiple ethnic groups and historical internal conflicts. It would have been better if the whole country adopted a complementary and collaborative approach to overcome the challenges of nation-building, development, democratic transformation and integration; otherwise each regional state would confront the serious challenges alone.

Secession may be a rational choice if we look only to the many grievances and bloodshed committed under the name of maintaining unity in the country. It appeared that the ruling elite have sacrificed unity for the sake of peace, because it is said 'peace is better than unity'. However, subsequent events proved the assumption is not true; since secession took place in July 2011, peace evaded us in the relationship between the two countries and within each state of the old Sudan. That is because neither southern Sudan nor northern Sudan is a homogeneous society; both are multi diversified in terms of ethnicity, culture and religion. Therefore, secession cannot be the answer to their diversity. If self-determination is to be applied as the only solution, the two states will end up in many ethnic conflicts and several secessions.

### **Consequences of Secession on the Relationship Between the Two States**

Concerning the relationship between north and south, there are serious suspended issues that need to be addressed in order to achieve a normal and peaceful relationship. Those issues are: borders, Abyei, popular consultation in southern Kordofan and Blue Nile, debts and assets, citizenship, oil, Nile water among others

#### ***Borders***

Sudan's long north-south border remains neither settled nor demarcated despite the efforts of the joint technical committee which worked on the subject for a number of years. The committee agreed on about 80 per cent of the 2,000-km-long border. There is an intensive human and animal mobility across the border which requires a quick and flexible solution.

#### ***Abyei***

The contested region of Abyei, proved to be the most difficult issue since the drafting of the CPA in Naivasha. A large number of northern nomads settle and travel through the region annually to graze their cattle in the south during the dry season and return in the rainy season. According to

Douglas Johnson, a historian on Sudan and member of the Abyei Boundary Commission, 'Abyei has so far proved to be the most difficult part of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) to implement, more difficult than the determination of the rest of the North-South boundary or the division of oil revenues' (Johnson 2006, [www.riftvalley.net/publications](http://www.riftvalley.net/publications)).

### ***Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States***

Both regions are part of the north but many of their young people supported SPLM/A and fought with its army against the Sudan government. They were given a special status in the CPA including the right for popular consultation at the end of the Interim Period, to decide if the CPA has addressed their grievances and the agreement has been implemented in a satisfactory way. The belt of the ten bordering states extending from Blue Nile to Upper Nile, southern Kordofan down to Western Bahr al-Ghazal to south Darfur is an integrated region in terms of language, culture, economic transaction and social mobility. Those states contain the majority of Sudan's natural resources (oil, agriculture, cattle, forestry...), and constitute one-third of Sudan total area and about 40 per cent of the whole population. Demarcation of a border in this region would sharply divide and cut off a fruitful relation among the peoples of this integrated belt which has existed for centuries, resulting in hardships for both communities across the border.

### ***Citizenship***

As a result of separation, hundreds of thousands of southerners living in the north and thousands of northerners residing in the south will suffer, because they do not have the right to choose the citizenship of the state in which they have settled down with their families for many years. About half of those people were born in the 'wrong side' of the border; they grew up and married in this part of the country, never conceiving that they would be foreigners in their chosen home. Issue of citizenship is not only legal, it carries significant economic and humanitarian dimensions that are yet to be solved.

### ***Oil and Water***

Oil reserves lie mainly in the south; however all its infrastructure and services are in the north (pipeline, chemical treatment, refineries, storage and the sea port). The two parties have to come to an agreement on how to use the facilities in the north and at what price. The Nile water running from south to north has to be shared between the two states in accordance with

the 1959 agreement between Sudan and Egypt. Although the south is not in need of the Nile water at this time, it still has the right to know its share and to decide what to do with it. The bargain on oil and water is bound to be affected by a deal on other issues as well.

It is ironical that those issues, which have been difficult to solve, could have been strong elements to support the unity of the whole Sudan, because they demonstrate how interdependent the two sides of the country are. Aldabello (2010), an author from the integrated region, described the natural richness of the area in details, which would have been beneficial for both countries. It contains most of the current oil production, and known for its abundant rainfall, fertile soil and the diversity of its natural wealth. John Garang called the area a region of *Tamazuj* (intermix) rather than *Tamas* (adjacent), the commonly used name; and he thought the whole Sudan should be a country of *Tamazuj*. Time might prove to the governments of the two countries that they need each other more than they ever thought. However, the two present governments are not likely to attempt a stronger linkage between the two states because of bitter experiences, mutual mistrust, ideological differences and national aspirations. The common understanding which existed between the two delegations during the long process of Naivasha negotiations became something of the past; the scene has completely changed to the worse. Each government will take its course in a different direction. Islam and Arabism is expected to be strengthened in the north, while secularism and Africanism will be entrenched in the south. According to a public opinion survey conducted by Faris Braizat, 80 per cent of the Sudanese in the north support the removal of all restrictions on the travel of Arab citizens to the Sudan, and to allow free exchange of commodities with the Arab world, which indicates strong support for the policy of Pan-Arabism (Braisat 2011).

On the other hand, South Sudan is drawing closer to the East African countries in economy, politics and culture. East African states have benefited from the secession by opening their markets to the needs of the South: commodities, labour, investment and construction. The South found cheap skilled labour and a reachable market for its huge oil production. Nevertheless, it has real problems to deal with: ethnic diversity and conflicts, widespread poverty, high illiteracy rate, poor infrastructure, lack of basic social services and a flabby, inexperienced civil service, and rampant corruption. At the same time, expectations of the new-earned independence are high among the population, especially the youth. The north is bound to be a loser by

the secession of the South because it lost 20 per cent of its population, 25 per cent of its land and about 40 per cent of its annual revenue. It marks a political failure to manage diversity in the country which still exists in the north. The north has to cope with the serious consequences of the secession: war in southern Kordofan and Blue Nile, increased tension in Darfur and maybe eastern Sudan; it further increased opposition in urban centres of the north and the hard-hit economy.

However, the difficult experience of secession might be in way useful for both countries to reconsider their positions for the future; the new situation provides the two states with an opportunity to develop normal relations between two close neighbours without the bitterness, animosity and the huge cost of the long civil war. The troubled relationship of the past prevented any positive engagement or fruitful cooperation. Thus, after secession, the two states may be wise enough to engage peacefully with each other, seeking cooperation and friendly relations on the bases of common interests and mutual benefits.

### **Consequences of Secession on the Stability of the Region**

Africa's founding fathers agreed on the borders left by colonial powers purposely to avoid the possible conflicts among rival tribes and the contest for natural resources across the borders in neighbouring independent states. The East African region in particular was described by International Crisis Group as having the following characteristics: history of regional meddling, proxy wars, cross-border entanglements, border disputes, resource competition and competing ideologies; besides a host of common ethnic groups which illustrate the interconnectedness of this region and the central position Sudan occupies in it (Crisis Group Report 2010).

The secession of southern Sudan is likely to affect the East African region as well as many African countries with similar diversity, ethnic structure and minority problems. However, some African leaders may choose to look at it from a positive angle, as president al-Bashir tried to do. He said at the occasion of announcing the result of the referendum: 'Secession of Southern Sudan should not be viewed by African states as an inspiration for separation in other African countries; it should be looked at as an example of a peaceful settlement for a long conflict. In other words, instead of looking at the empty part of the cup, we try to see the full half.' The consequences of the secession of southern Sudan on the stability of the region depend mainly on the following factors:

- (i) The nature of relationship that the two emerging states of Sudan will establish between them; positive relationship will have a positive impact on the region and the vice versa. Thus, it is important for neighbouring countries to support the establishment of good relations between the two sides of Sudan; they have potential capabilities of doing so, if they wish.
- (ii) Since Sudan lies in the fort lines between Eastern, Central and North Africa regions (politically, socially and culturally); the internal policies adopted by each side can either foster good relations between the different regions of Africa or sensitise and provoke a negative impact. The success of each side in building a viable political system which serves the well-being of its people will help the whole region to interact positively.
- (iii) The type of relations established by neighbouring countries with each part of the Sudan will have its good or bad impact. If it is a balanced, cooperative and non-interventionist relation, it will help both parts.

In the past, the problem of southern Sudan has created tensions between northern Sudan and neighboring countries, namely: Uganda, Eritria, Kenya and Ethiopia. All of them, at one time or another, helped southern rebel movements against the government of Khartoum. The realisation of secession will relieve the region from mutual hatreds and reciprocal destabilisation attempts caused by uneasy relations between north and south. Uganda, through its good relations with the new state of South Sudan, may succeed in solving the rebellion of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in its northern border. Tensions between Sudan and other neighbouring countries may gradually be normalised and the whole region moves forward to build connecting roads, engages in the exchange of commodities and seeks different kinds of fruitful cooperation. However, this positive scenario requires a significant amount of goodwill on the part of neighbouring countries, particularly Uganda and Kenya that may feel threatened by good relationship between Sudan and South Sudan.

### **Positions of Neighbouring Countries**

The neighbouring countries to Sudan were, directly or indirectly, affected by the civil war on its territory. Each state has its security concerns, economic interests, ideological preferences and external links that shape its policies towards Sudan. Most of them were in favour of an independent southern Sudan; they saw an economic opportunity in the oil wealth of the new state that can be utilised for their benefit. If we look at the positions of the closest neighbours to Sudan we will find the following:

## Kenya

Kenya has supported SPLM since it was ousted from Ethiopia in 1991; and SPLM soon established its headquarters in Nairobi. Kenya became the logistical entrance for SPLM to all areas of southern Sudan. Since Kenya hosted the peace negotiations at Naivasha for three years, which produced the CPA that allowed the right for self-determination to the south, it is natural that it would expect to be rewarded for its services. It will set its eyes on big infrastructure projects, an emerging commodity market and an opening for investment and creation of jobs. Kenya Commercial Bank has already opened eight branches in South Sudan since 2006; hundreds of Kenyans have been working in construction, transport and the private commercial sector. Kenyan officials and South Sudanese started discussions on a multi-billion-dollar pipeline (1,400 km) from Juba to the coastal port of Lamu. Khartoum has registered repeated complaints protesting Kenya's direct involvement on issues dealing with its national sovereignty. In September 2008, a shipment of weapons including T-71 and T-72 tanks, anti-aircraft guns, RPG-7V grenade launchers, BM-21 122 mm rocket launchers, thousands of rounds of ammunition, and spare parts was hijacked on the way by Somali pirates. It was ostensibly an acquisition of Kenya's defence ministry but it was purchased by the government of southern Sudan to be transported later to South Sudan. Kenyan officials acknowledged their government's role in facilitating weapons transfers to southern Sudan (Crisis Group Report, March 2010).

## Uganda

Uganda has social and cultural ties with southern Sudan; the Acholi tribe has for many years lived across the border in both countries. Uganda has supported the rebel groups of southern Sudan since their first inception in 1955. After Naivasha agreement, while the official policy of Uganda was to respect the CPA which gives preference to unity, some senior officials in Kampala privately encouraged secession. Ugandan government announced in public forums that unity of the Sudan has not been made attractive to the southerners by their northern counterparts. A Ugandan minister said: Kampala may pay lip-service to orderly resolution of the CPA but will no doubt support independence of the south regardless of the recognition of Khartoum or even of African Union (Crisis Group, March 2010). Today, Ugandans are believed to be the largest group of foreign nationals working in South Sudan. Ugandan exports to the South showed three-fold increase in just two years (2006-2008) making South Sudan the number one recipient of Ugandan goods worldwide (Crisis Group,

May 2010). However, security considerations remain Kampala's primary strategic interest. Uganda continues to seek a strong security partner and stable buffer zone on its northern border, which it claims would help to prevent the re-emergence of insurgent groups. Besides, Uganda is afraid of an imagined Arab and Islamic expansion in the region.

## **Ethiopia**

The Ethiopian government played the most crucial role in supporting SPLM/A during its early days of war in the 1990s. However, after the fall of Mengistu, things changed and relations with Khartoum were restored and economic relations were rapidly growing. Today, Ethiopia maintains significant ties with South Sudan while keeping good relations with Khartoum. Ethiopia has an interest to balance its relations with the two sides of Sudan, thus it took a neutral position towards independence of the south. Regional security remains a primary concern for Ethiopia, given the instability in Somalia, confrontation with Eritrea and its own domestic fragility. Addis Ababa can neither afford a renewed war in Sudan nor an additional enemy in Khartoum. It has its share of separatist groups, such as the Oromo and Ogden communities. This is why Ethiopia will not encourage a new dispute in the region. As a matter of fact, it aspires to win new friends to its side. In spite of that, Ethiopia supported the right of self-determination and showed its respect for the independence of the south. The religious and cultural ties with the south have been balanced by significant mutual economic benefits and water links with the north. But at one time, Ethiopia was accused of transporting armaments to Juba in 2008 (Lewis 2009).

In general, concerning the positions of the neighbouring countries towards separation of the south, it is only Ethiopia which remained neutral in the conflict with good relations with both sides. However, the shift of oil to the south and the future size of trade might outweigh in favour of stronger links with the new state. Meanwhile, the economic relationship between Juba and Addis Ababa has expanded considerably in the areas of investment, trade and communication. There are regular flights between the two cities, and the state-owned Commercial Bank of Ethiopia has begun business in South Sudan.

## **Eritrea**

The Eritrean government faces a dilemma: on the one hand it supported the SPLM/A and Sudan's opposition groups; on the other hand it opted lately for stable relations with the government of Khartoum. In the early days of

the Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) peace talks, it defended the principles of secular Sudan and the right of self-determination for southern Sudan. At that time it worked for regime change in Khartoum rather than for secession. Afewerki also supported the opposition of eastern and western Sudan (Beja Congress and Sudan Liberation Army of Darfur). In the meantime, finding himself isolated in the region, Afewerki made a rapprochement with Khartoum. He openly proposed the postponement of the referendum which Khartoum asked for; but to some observers, Eritrea's position on South Sudan independence is likewise unreliable. Afewerki's policy may be driven by self-preservation rather than principles. Being isolated in the region and beyond, he is ready to seek allies anywhere. He managed in the last few years to expand private business with South Sudan, which is likely to flourish because of Eritrea's rigid economic system.

### **The two Sudans' Future Trends: East African Community and the Arab World**

The role played by East African Community (EAC) on the secession of southern Sudan has weakened the position of northern Sudan in the regional forum. Before referendum took place, senior members in EAC welcomed, in advance, the membership of South Sudan if it became an independent state. The government of Sudan viewed this stand as an encouragement for secession. On the other side, the community was divided on the membership of the Sudan; Uganda and Tanzania were openly against it and eventually it was referred to the next summit meeting. It is not likely that Sudan will get the membership of the EAC in the near future. A number of those countries took a position on the division of Nile Waters Agreement opposite to that of Egypt and Sudan, the South is likely to side with them. In the future, most likely the north will strengthen its economic and cultural relations with North Africa and the Arab world while South Sudan will build its relations with East and southern Africa. To some people in the north, although the IGAD played a positive role in reaching the peace agreement in Sudan, the price was very high for Sudan.

Sudan has always kept good relations with Arab countries, especially Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. In 2004, presidents Al-Bashir and Mubarak of Egypt signed the 'four freedoms agreement', guaranteeing freedom of movement, residence, work, and ownership of property in the two countries. Estimates put the number of Sudanese residing in Egypt today as high as three million. Because of its historical relationship and its strategic Nile link, Egypt has always

supported the unity of Sudan. Despite American pressure, it has never accepted the right of self-determination for southern Sudan. On the other side of the Red Sea, hundreds of thousands of Sudanese are living and working in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states earning considerable money to help their families back at home. The radical political changes towards democracy in North Africa and some other Arab countries will make economic and political collaboration with Sudan even stronger because of the popular Islamic dimension in all these countries. Sudanese relations with West Africa will remain unaffected and will continue to serve as a bridge between the north and other African countries, because of the significant Muslim presence in the region.

## Conclusion

The real problem of the Sudan which led to the separation of the south and conflicts in other regions is the failure of the central authority, for many years, to manage diversity of the country on fair and equitable bases, besides external interventions. The government could not read the plain words on the wall that something drastic is going to happen unless the centre changes its attitude towards the marginalised regions. However, the CPA is designed to suit the hostile partners who wanted to grab power in the north and in the south. Other political powers in both regions were left with no role to play in the political drama going on in their midst. The southerners, who voted overwhelmingly in favour of secession, did not vote against the northerners but against the policies of the ruling elite which betrayed its national mission. It is not hopeless that sometime in the future the Sudanese people in the north and south will reconsider some form of unity or close relationship to bring them together. Both countries wanted peace, freedom, equality, stability and social welfare; if they do not achieve that by separation under their present semi-military governments, they may in the future return towards a form of unity again.

The survey conducted by Braizat (2011) concerning the views of northerners towards secession found out that 62 per cent of them were in favour of a future union; particularly the educated class which has always been against secession. There is also an inverse relationship in the survey between age and support for secession: the older a person is, the less likely he or she would support separation. The survey also showed that those who were economically poor and those who were less satisfied with government policies opposed secession; but the economically well off, and satisfied with government policies did not oppose secession. (Braizat 2011:18).

Neighbouring countries might have done better for all of Africa if they supported the central idea of Dr John Garang, the charismatic leader of the SPLM, of a united new Sudan which shares power and wealth equally among its entire people irrespective of their race, culture or religion. The people of the north do sympathize with the southerners who suffered in the past, but they do not agree that their grievances should lead them to separation, realizing the agendas of colonial powers who worked for their own interests. Independence means that one should be one's own master instead of serving the policies of big powers anywhere. The big lesson for the north is that unity of the country cannot be achieved by repression or military means; it comes easily by justice, equality, freedom and good management of diversity.

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