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POLICY BRIEF

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Political Parties and the Push for Political Consensus[1]

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Summary

- *The events of December 2013 have created a very divisive environment in South Sudan and so there is need for the country to start anew. The new beginning can only be realized when all the political forces in the country reach a common understanding on what binds the nation together.*
- *The political consensus that was built throughout the years of liberation struggle and solidified during the referendum and the subsequent declaration of independence is no more. This is because after the declaration of independence in 2011, it was no longer clear what was the overarching societal objective around which people should rally.*
- *The higher purpose or ideal is the thing around which a general agreement is built or should be built. In other words, political forces must reach a general understanding or political consensus on the important things that override personal or groups' interests.*
- *South Sudan's constitution advocates for a plural nation based on multi-party democracy in the pursuit of a higher societal objective, which is a united, peaceful, and prosperous South Sudan based on justice, equality, respect for human rights and the rule of law.*
- *The Agreement on the Resolution of Crisis in South Sudan (ARCISS), though inadequate in many ways, provides an opportunity to pause, reconfigure, and regain the vital signs of a viable nation.*
- *The political parties play a critical role in articulating different policy positions on different national objectives. There is a need to improve the operational environment of the political parties because the just signed peace agreement does not really encourage competitive politics; it seemingly endorses one party dominated politics.*
- *If the SPLM reunification agreement holds, the only way competitive politics could be ensured would be to democratize the SPLM and detach it from the military while developing the capacity of perhaps one or two opposition parties to challenge the SPLM comes the next elections.*
- *There would be need to convene series of national dialogue conferences involving all political parties, churches and other faith-based institutions, civil society, academics, trade unions, and traditional leadership. The dialogues would serve as platforms for building and consolidating national consensus on the constitution and the system of governance.*

I. Introduction

This paper aims at exploring how the signing of the current peace agreement could be used as an opportunity for the people of South Sudan to dialogue and reconstitute political consensus. It largely focuses on the role of political parties in providing a vision around which the society can be mobilized. The people of South Sudan have had the benefit of experiencing the important role political parties play in their political life over the course of the liberation struggle. This is because political parties and movements have been instrumental in shaping the direction of South Sudan's long struggle, as they have been able to unite and mobilize the efforts of the South Sudanese to fight for their freedom. These efforts culminated in the popular referendum leading to the declaration of independence in 2011. To sustain the unity and commitment of the South Sudanese to the higher purpose, the political parties played the role of reminding and bringing them back to consensus. The higher purpose as its name suggests is something that is bigger than life, which is why people make the ultimate sacrifices to defend what they believe, is at the core of their being.

The people of South Sudan have always responded when they are called to serve a higher purpose. That is why there are millions of martyrs in this country. We can say therefore, that the political forces that have come and go in South Sudan before the independence, mobilized the society against what was perceived as foreign subjugation of the Southern Sudanese. After independence, however, it was no longer clear what was the higher purpose around which the people should mobilize. Lack of this, it is now believed, contributed to the crisis of December 15, 2013.

The higher purpose or ideal is the thing around which a general agreement is built or should be built. In other words, political forces must reach a general understanding or political consensus on the important things that override personal or groups interests. Even when political parties compete for state power, the competition is built around programs or strategies that would best protect and enhance the achievement of the overarching societal objective. Evidently, in the case of South Sudan, the political consensus that was built throughout the years of liberation struggle and solidified during the referendum and the subsequent declaration of independence is no more. This is because the rallying issue at the time, as previously stated, was people's desire for freedom from Khartoum-based regimes. Now, what is the higher purpose around which South Sudanese should rally?

The Transitional Constitution speaks about the aspirations of the people of South Sudan to build a plural nation based on multi-party democracy in the pursuit of a higher societal objective, which is a united, peaceful, and prosperous society based on justice, equality, respect for human rights and the rule of law. This, in essence, is perhaps the central objective around which political consensus is to be built. The current peace agreement presents a unique opportunity to reset both social and political relations in the country. Therefore, the thought of re-envisioning the role of political parties in building a new political consensus is pertinently urgent.

Under the current peace agreement a new purpose for the country that is bigger than the prevailing political differences can be constructed. For instance, the agreement contains a number of provisions that are aimed at building a new political consensus. These provisions include power-sharing ratios and shared decision-making processes, both in the national cabinet

and parliament. As well, the agreement stipulates the review of a number of parliamentary acts as a way to reconstitute broad-based agreement on them. More importantly, the agreement provides for the making of a permanent constitution, an exercise that is essential in forging national consensus. The hope is that once the entire institutional environment in which political parties are to operate is set, an election will be conducted in order for the sovereign, the people of South Sudan, to confer legitimacy on a new political team to run the country.

Presently, South Sudan is a nation divided so bitterly by the current conflict on top of so many wounds and scars left unhealed in the previous wars. This is the context in which the political forces, especially the parties, will be operating as they try to re-establish the unity of opinions of the people. Consensus according to the dictionary is the quality or condition of being in complete agreement or harmony[2]. Accordingly, political consensus may be defined as a state of the nation when all the political forces are in complete agreement on foundational issues that affect its stability. Though the recently signed agreement affords the country an opportunity to return to political normalcy, it does not completely guarantee sustainable political stability. Owing to this seemingly precarious situation, a concerted effort to forge national consensus is needed to bring the nation together around a higher purpose, much of it a responsibility of the political parties.

This paper explores the importance of political consensus in engendering and sustaining national stability. It suggests that engaging political parties in consensus building provides an enabling environment for the realization of political stability in the country. To gain stability, political parties can no longer be ignored. The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Part II looks at the basic theoretical underpinnings and definitions of a political party, Part III surveys the historical evolution of political parties in South Sudan and whether they have been able to build consensus, Part IV looks at the current state of the political parties in South Sudan and their ability to build consensus, Part V explores the significance of the just signed agreement in promoting political consensus. In Part VI, the paper concludes with a set of actionable recommendations towards building political consensus and attaining stability.

II.   Theory and Functions of Political Parties

Before we discuss the importance of political parties in relation to their role in building political consensus, it is imperative to establish what political parties are. The most commonly cited definition of political parties comes from the American political scientist, Anthony Downs, who defines a political party as "a team of men seeking to control the governing apparatus by gaining office in a duly constituted election" (Downs, 1957). This definition was slightly modified by Kaare Strom who describes a political party as an organization that seeks benefits derived from public office by gaining representation in duly constituted elections (Strom, 1990). The Italian scholar, Giovanni Sartori (1976: 64), slightly diverges from Downs and Strom as he posits that a political party is "any political group that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections, candidates for public office." As well, Eddy Asirvatham defines political party as "an organized body of people who stand for certain principles and policies in the political life of the country by whose operation they seek to promote the interests of the country as a whole" (Asirvatham, 2008:418). For the purposes of this paper, I am inclined to accept Asirvatham's definition as the operational definition of political parties. While there are understandably

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[2] http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Consensus+politics

different ways we can define political parties, there are common features that form what we understand political parties to be.

A German foundation, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, established criteria for identifying political parties (Grabow, 2011). In the foundation's view, a political party first and foremost strives to influence the formation of political opinion and aims to have a general political impact. Second, the active influence of political opinion making is aimed at a longer period of time as well as a wider region and should not be concentrated on a local level or a single issue. Third, a party is an association of citizens holding memberships, and has a minimum number of members, so that the seriousness of its targets and the prospects of success remain clear. Fourth, a party has to demonstrate the will to consistently take part in the political representation of the people during elections. Fifth, a party has to be an independent and permanent organization; it is not formed only for one election and ceases to exist afterwards. Lastly, a party must be willing to appear in public, hence, no political party is to operate in the dark.

Within the foregoing scenery, it can be presumed, therefore, that a party's political contribution, as well as its political "weight", is closely tied to elections. This suggests that competition among parties is the instrument of gaining political power, with the whole organization of a party ultimately aimed at gaining power and therefore, the will of the voters is of importance for the parties (Grabow, 2011). Perhaps, the broader question that deserves being answered is why are political parties needed?

The debate has ever been around pitting those who believe that a plural, democratic society needs political parties to function against those who view party organizations as "sinister interests" prone to undermining, perverting, or usurping the will of the majority (Norris, 2005). Johnson (2005) argues that parties are important because they promote public participation in governance. They provide institutional grounding for meaningful participation. To him, "participation without institutions is chaotic, ineffective, and is likely to serve the few at the expense of the many" (Johnson, 2005). Likewise, institutions without participation are an empty exercise at best—and more often, at worst, tools of control from above (Johnson, 2005). Political parties are different from other political or social associations in a sense that they offer policy options that seek to satisfy interests of broader spectrum of society. Political parties are organized at various levels of the society and are ready to govern the moment they come to power. This cannot be said of other voluntary associations. Political parties are among the most crucial institutions in promoting democratic processes (Johnson, 2005).

Specifically, the functions of political parties according to Norris (2005), can be summarized as follows: First, political parties play a critical role in mobilizing and aggregating support among broad coalitions of citizens' organizations and interest groups. Second, political parties articulate and integrate multiple conflicting demands into coherent policy formulations and programs. Third, they recruit, train and prepare political leaders for office. Fourth, parties provide voters with choices among governing teams and policies and, if elected to office, organize the process of government and stand collectively accountable for their actions in subsequent electoral contests (Norris, 2005). The same cannot be said about religious or other associations. Other associations do not necessarily play by the rules that govern political parties.

In light of the preceding discussions, political parties play a crucial role of connecting their leaders to the followers through simplification of political choices and framing them in terms of citizens' own interests (Johnson, 2005). Political party leaders are actually political entrepreneurs, because they organize political parties that supply public policies, as they are demanded. It is important, of course, to note that individuals that become party leaders enter the business of politics as self-interested and not necessarily altruistic or benevolent (Strom, 1990). In other words, they become party leaders because of the benefits associated with a political office such as the prestige and financial benefits. This being the case, a party leader left unchecked, would pursue office benefits more than the policy outcomes they have promised voters.

However, more often than not, most party leaders are motivated primarily by policy influence and not necessarily by perceived benefits derived from a political office. Still, there must be institutional restrains on the party leaders. The beauty of democratic parties is that party leaders are constrained by the organizational structures of their parties (Strom, 1990). Hence, they must take into account not only their policy preferences, but also the preferences of their party members and that of the electorate. For parties to be successful in a competitive political environment they should be able to gather information about the voters and their policy preferences, mobilize supporters, and effectively implement party policies. For parties to properly function and deliver political programs that meet the needs of the electorate, existing institutional set-up is critical. This is why there has to be political consensus on fundamental principles that govern the state, such as the constitution and the system of government.

What differentiates political parties, therefore, are the policy options they offer, as well as their organizational capacity to mobilize a broad base support. This is what is referred to as the electoral competitiveness of the party. According to Strom (1990), electoral competitiveness is the aggregate uncertainty of electoral contests as perceived by party leaders. Competitiveness, therefore, is a degree to which electoral results are expected to vary across the set of feasible policy positions of the parties (Strom, 1990). The more electoral outcomes are expected to vary across policy positions, the more competitive the election. The greater the electoral competitiveness, the more keenly parties respect the will of the electorate as they pursue their votes (Strom, 1990). The operational environment of political parties, of course, varies greatly based on each political context. Following is an overview of the historical context in which political parties emerged in South Sudan.

III.   The Evolution of Political Parties in South Sudan

The Evolution of Political Parties in South Sudan

While South Sudan has historically been subjugated under various forms of colonial governments in the Sudan, including the Turks, Anglo-Egyptians and Khartoum-based regimes, South Sudanese still managed to form political parties during their long liberation. Though the parties were not necessarily formed to contest for state power, they came to exist with the intention to advocate for the cause of the people of South Sudan. Leading people's cause involved building a broad base understanding of the issues that affect the society or a section of it. This was the primary task of the old Southern Sudanese political parties; to build consensus among Southerners so they can collectively determine their future. One of the first incidents that precipitated the creation of the first Southern-based party was the agreement that granted Sudan

self-government, reached between the Northern-based parties and the Egyptian government in February 1953 (SPLM-DC, 2014).

While the agreement was fundamental in terms of what it meant for the future of the country, Southerners were not invited to participate in the talks on the grounds that they did not have a political party of their own. With Southerners absent on the table, the agreement essentially did away with the assurances given to the Southerners in support for a united Sudan (SPLM-DC, 2014). Bitterly disappointed by these developments, Southerners responded with the formation of a political party in April 1953. The party was initially called the "Southern Party", but after the 1953 elections, it was re-named the "Liberal Party" (SPLM-DC, 2014). Benjamin Lwoki led it under the patronage of Abdel Rahman Sule and Fahal Ukanda, both Muslims (SPLM-DC, 2014) –an apparent indication that non-Muslims could not form a political party.

Following the formation of self-government in 1954, the Sudanese National Assembly voted for independence on 19 December 1955, only very few Southerners supported the declaration of independence on condition that federation would be considered for South Sudan after independence, a condition that was agreed to by the Northerners (Vambheim, 2007). When a committee was formed to consider the Southern demand for federation in 1956, only three out of 46 members were Southerners, and all three withdrew from the committee long before its concluding report was published, because they were "always hopelessly outvoted" (Vambheim, 2007). The committee's report was undoubtedly in contradiction to the aspirations of Southerners as it came out in December 1957 with a strong recommendation against any form of federal constitutional arrangement in the Sudan (Vambheim, 2007).

These developments once again angered the Southerners, so they took a stand by forming the "Federal Party", owing to the disappointing performance of the Liberal Party (SPLM-DC, 2014). The party was led by an Executive Central Committee in Khartoum with Ezbon Mundiri Gwanza as President and Darius Beshir as Secretary General (SPLM-DC, 2014). Although he won a seat in the 1957 parliamentary elections, Ezbon Mundiri Gwanza was arrested immediately thereafter, and Fr. Saturnino Lohure led the parliamentary group of the Federal Party (Vambheim, 2007).

When Prime Minister Abdullah Khalil of the National Umma Party was deposed in a military coup led by Lt. General Ibrahim Ibboud on November 17, 1958, a state-of-emergency was declared, the constitution was suspended, the parliament was dissolved, and all political parties were banned[3]. The coup effectively forced all Southern political activists into exile in neighboring countries where they continued their political activism. However, Southerners inside the country continued clandestine political activities in Khartoum that gave birth to a political movement that became the Southern Front, which Gordon Abyei, with support from students and Southern academics, founded and formally registered in November 1964 (Vambheim, 2007). Up to February 1965, the Southern Front was the only political organization representing Southerners inside Sudan. Unlike all the preceding Southern political organizations that had called for federalism or confederation, the expressed objective of the Southern Front was the realization of the right to self-determination of the people of Southern Sudan (SPLM-DC, 2014).

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[3] http://uca.edu/politicalscience/dadm-project/sub-saharan-africa-region/70-republic-of-sudan-1956-present/

In exile, the first Southern political movement began to surface in 1960. Its founders and leading members functioned as the true representatives of the Southern cause abroad and inside the Sudan. While they belonged to various factions, they all were championing the cause of the people of Southern Sudan. Though there were few dissenting voices such as the members of Sudan Unity Party advocating for the unity of Sudan, most leaders were either for federation or separation (Vambheim, 2007). The first political organization in exile was the Sudan Christian Association (SCA) created in 1961 in Uganda by Joseph Oduho, Aggrey Jaden, Alexi Mbali and Saturnino Lohure (Vambheim, 2007). In 1962 the headquarters of the SCA was moved to Leopoldville, Congo, where it metamorphosed into Sudan African Closed Districts National Union (SACDNU) (Vambheim, 2007). While in Congo, William Deng had joined the party-leadership as Secretary General and by 1963, the party moved its headquarters to Kampala, Uganda, and changed its name again, to Sudan African National Union (SANU), in an attempt to widen its support base among the African tribes in the Sudan (Vambheim, 2007).

As with all political organizations, SANU got into political turmoil following internal differences between William Deng and Joseph Oduho. The differences led to the split of the party with one faction of the SANU under the leadership of Joseph Oduho and Aggrey Jaden and the other faction under William Deng Nhial. Though the disagreement started as power struggle within the party, it evolved into strategic differences in a sense that William Deng's faction wanted the party's platform to focus on the issue of federalism as the ultimate solution to the grievances of Southerners, considering the restrictions of the Organization of African Unity (AOU) on secession, while the Oduho/Jaden faction wanted an outright separation as the solution to the longstanding subjugation of Southerners (Vambheim, 2007).

In the aftermath of the party split in exile, William Deng Nhial returned to Khartoum in February 1965 and registered SANU as a political party where it subsequently took part in the Round Table Conference (RTC) and continued as a political party thereafter. SANU advocated the application of the federal system as the best way to rule a united Sudan (SPLM-DC, 2014). With the registration of SANU in Khartoum, there were effectively two rivaling Southern parties, the Southern Front and SANU. The parties started initially from different positions on the question of separation and federalism. Southern Front stood with the external faction of SANU, which called for an outright separation for the people of South Sudan. The support of Southern Front to the exiled SANU was not only because of the convergence of their ideas on the future of Southern Sudan, its leadership felt a legitimate fear of potentially being sidelined by William Deng and his party, were the government to proceed with the negotiations at the Round Table Conference (RTC) without SANU (outside) and Southern Front (Vambheim, 2007).

In as far as political consensus is concerned, what can be drawn from the history of political parties in Southern Sudan prior to the 1972 agreement is the fact that most Southern political leaders had agreed in principle that the subjugation of the people of Southern Sudan had to end. This was the central issue around which political parties organized and offered varying options to the people of South Sudan in the form of strategy for achieving the fundamental freedoms in Southern Sudan. One factor that seems to have contributed to the weakness of these parties was their inability to mobilize the rural Southerners and institutionalize their ideas and political programs. What seems evident is the fact that they unnecessarily left too many things to chance and operated rather in a chaotic political milieu. In other words, they were always reacting to the

actions of Northerners. Perhaps, these events provided the much-needed unity of opinions among Southerners, something they could not achieve on their own. Though there was general agreement on the objective to liberate the people of South Sudan, egos, personalities and political opportunism seemingly betrayed their efforts to stick to the broader objective, which explains why they could not get over some of their trivial internal differences.

The period following the signing of the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement, SANU and Southern Front essentially battled for votes and power for the Southern Autonomous government. This political competition was arguably healthy for the evolution of a strong two-party democracy. What is not so clear is what exactly was the strategy of each party to achieve the liberation of the people of South Sudan during this period. The spoils of the new autonomous government seemingly disoriented the parties. Hence, focus was somewhat lost on the bigger objective. The heat of political competition basically created tensions. Though the political differences between Southern politicians were normal in the exercise of political competition, Northerners exploited them.

The policies of the Nimeri government catalyzed and amplified tensions between Southerners and so by the late 1970s and early 1980s, the political situation started to change in Southern Sudan. Politics became more regional and tribal and one would argue that political consensus started to mortify. This situation evolved and grew into a crisis in 1981 when Nimeri proposed the division of Southern Sudan into three regions, injecting deadly venom into what was a simple internal debate. This turned into regional and tribal animosity and giving birth to the phenomenon that became known as the Kokora (Deng, 2015). Political expediencies and the apparent pettiness with which politics was conducted, overshadowed the liberation dream and vision, the base around which political consensus was to be mobilized.

This was the state of South Sudan when the civil war was renewed with the founding of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). Given that Kokora fueled suspicion and distrust among the people of South Sudan, many Equatorians, at first, saw the SPLM/A as a movement of the Nuer, the Dinka, and the Shilluk. It was not until few years later that a large number of Equatorians joined the movement. The SPLM/A itself ran into leadership crisis right from the inception leading to the first split in 1983 and the ensuing factional war between those who purported to support outright separation and the pro-unity elements (Nyaba, 1996). These divisions nagged the movement until a second major split occurred in 1991. Again, this split was also over leadership struggle, but later on the Nasir faction advocated for an outright separation and the mainstream faction remained in pursuit of a united, secular, and democratic New Sudan. The divisions nearly mirrored the SANU/Southern Front splits and the major point of contention was which strategy was best to attain the liberation of Southerners. Although the splits later on degenerated into tribal divisions, there was still a strong consensus on the fact that the subjugation of Southerners is to be ended in earnest. Where consensus could not be reached was how best to achieve it. These divisions persisted until 2002 when the two factions reunited (Nyaba, 2011).

The timely reunification of different SPLM factions in 2002 provided a much-needed impetus for the signing of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). The people of Southern Sudan had broadly accepted the CPA as the best model for achieving the liberation, as it provided both unity and separation options. With regards to the state power, the CPA essentially gave the

SPLM control over the autonomous region of Southern Sudan, constituting 70% and nearly 30% of power in the southern and national governments, respectively. Other Southern based political parties were given 16% at the national level and 30% in Southern Sudan. Since the state power was obtained through a negotiated political settlement, the other political parties were not afforded the opportunity to enter negotiation with the SPLM. The SPLM essentially rewarded itself with the state power and all the other goodies that come with the state power. It waves buoyantly its liberation card every time its dominant power is questioned. In retrospect, one can say that perhaps it was a good thing for the SPLM to control the state power with complete dominance because political competition would have derailed once again the broader vision as we have learned from the 1972 agreement.

The SPLM's vision was so compelling so that the other political forces did not really seem to have anything to offer and had to bank on the magnanimity of the SPLM and its state vision. As a result, the SPLM managed to get away with so many mistakes during the CPA era because it benefited greatly from the fear of the people of South Sudan of the intentions of the Sudanese Government towards the referendum. The people of South Sudan did not want anything that would create a wedge between them and risk losing the opportunity to determine their destiny. In this spirit, most political parties did not field candidates for presidential elections in 2010; instead, they rallied behind the SPLM. The only party that fielded a presidential candidate was the SPLM-Democratic Change (SPLM-DC).

Sadly, both the results of SPLM primaries and the general elections left so much to be desired in terms of the democratic evolution in South Sudan. There were widespread reports of intimidation of rival political aspirants and brazen rigging of elections in favor of SPLM candidates in some constituencies. Following contentious SPLM congresses caused primarily by the decision of the political bureau to disregard some popular candidates and handpicked people of their choice, many people opted to run as independent candidates. After the announcement of the election results, instantaneous rebellions ensued and divisions within the party at various levels became apparent. This created a debilitating dent in the country's political consensus.

Recognizing the monumental significance of the referendum and the divisive political environment created by the 2010 elections, President Salva Kiir Mayardit, realized the urgent need for the unity of the people as they entered the historical plebiscite to determine their future. He first of all offered a blanket amnesty to all the forces that had taken up arms against the state following the elections. Then he convened an All-Southern Sudanese Political Parties Conference in October 2010. The expressed theme of the conference was "Southern Sudanese United for Free, Fair and Transparent Referenda" (South Sudan News Agency, 2010). Twenty political parties, in addition to civil society organizations and faith-based groups, sent delegates to the conference. The conference was an attempt to forge new political consensus and align all the political forces behind the referendum (South Sudan News Agency, 2010). At the closing of the conference, Political Parties Leadership Forum (PPLF) was established to enable continued political dialogue within the political leadership of the country. One can say without hesitation that the period leading to the referendum is the single moment in the history of South Sudan that was marked by a real sense of political consensus and unity of opinions. Political, ethnic, regional and even religious differences were set aside and South Sudan was promising political maturity.

After a successful conduct of the referendum and the subsequent declaration of independence in 2011, most of the resolutions of the All-Southern Sudanese Political Parties Conference in 2010 were not followed to the letter and spirit, and so the semblance of political consensus that was created in 2010 started to dissipate. The political parties started to accuse the ruling party of taking unilateral decisions to form the government and even pass the transitional constitution without consultation, contrary to the spirit of the Conference.

The political leaders in the SPLM seem to have fallen in the same trap after independence, just as the leaders of Southern autonomous government following the 1972 agreement had. The grand vision of building a united, just, and prosperous society was seemingly cast aside and egoism, personalities, and political expediencies ruled the day. The people of South Sudan seem to quickly disintegrate when they are not led with a vision that transcends their petty differences. More often than not, conflicts seem to arise when the political leaders veer off of the central objective that keeps the society together. It would seem plausible that in order to build a sustainable political system in South Sudan, the overarching objective of the society must always be kept above politics.

IV.   The Current State of Political Parties in South Sudan

Since this paper aims at exploring the possibility of reconstituting political consensus in South Sudan, a role played primarily by political parties, one is compelled to look at the state of political parties in South Sudan and the institutional framework in which they operate. To do this, there must be reasonable criteria for evaluating whether the parties are viable and whether they are performing at the expected level. Early this year, the Sudd Institute had the privilege of assessing the state of political parties in a sample of states in South Sudan. The assessment focused on seven critical areas, four of which are relevant to this study. First, we looked at the ability of political parties to mobilize and aggregate support among broad coalitions of citizens. Second, we assessed the ability of parties to articulate and integrate multiple conflicting public demands into coherent policy formulations and programs. Third, we reviewed how they recruit, train, and prepare political leaders for office. Finally, we evaluated whether the political parties provide voters with distinct policy choices. The assessment targeted 9 political parties in five states of Eastern Equatoria, Jonglei, Lakes, Northern Bahr El Ghazal and Warrap. Following were the results of the assessment[4].

On the question of whether the parties have the ability and the capacity to mobilize and aggregate support among broad coalitions of citizens and interest groups, there was not enough evidence to suggest that the parties were capable of mobilizing a broad base support, except for the SPLM. Looking at the institutional capacity of the parties in the aforementioned states, it was apparent that nearly all the parties, except the SPLM, are grossly inadequate in terms of party cadres running the party secretariats in the states. Though all parties, except USSP, reported having functioning party state secretariats, evidence from the assessment points to the contrary. For example, other than the SPLM, party structures in the states are dysfunctional because they lack sustainable funding and are unable to rent or build offices. This makes it hard

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[4] It is important to note here that the inclusion of the SPLM in the sample does negatively affect the results, as it is responsible for determining the nature of political landscape of the country. As well, although the sampling was random, the selection of states was affected by the current conflict.

to understand how these parties are effectively operating on-day-today basis. For a party to mobilize a critical mass to support its policy propositions, it must have an effective communication system. The assessment found no meaningful communication system or strategy in place among all the political parties, including the SPLM. In fact, most party leaders did not even have computers, which are essential tools for developing and transmitting fundamental messages these days.

Regarding the ability of parties to articulate and integrate multiple conflicting public demands into coherent policy formulations and programs, most parties have prepared and articulated their visions for the nation. We found no stark ideological variation among parties, however. The differences observed were largely programmatic and not necessarily ideological. No party is profoundly distinct from all the others in terms of offering radically new ideas. What seems to be the serious challenge for the parties is their inability to actually go out and sell their platforms. Lack of financial resources as previously mentioned is the most inhibiting factor, in addition to lack of mobility and of volunteers to carry the messages of the parties. Regarding the ability of the parties to implement community outreach programs, most parties reported wanting go out to the counties, payams, and bomas in order to conduct meetings and explain their manifestoes and programs. Nevertheless, the parties cite lack of transport, financial difficulties, language barriers and restrictions placed on civil servants not to directly participate in political activities as foremost hindrances in achieving their political objectives. Nearly all the parties reported using radio as the primary mechanism for passing their messages to the public. What is clear is that the SPLM, due to the lack of strong opposition parties, justifiably dominates the political space in most states and keeps other parties at bay. Perhaps the remedy for this is for the state to provide financial resources to develop one or two other parties to improve the democratic space in the country

The final element pertains to the capacity of the political parties to recruit, train and prepare political leaders for office. The assessment found no evidence of political parties providing the training to their cadres at the state level, except some basic trainings that the International Republican Institute (IRI) had offered. This suggests that the parties are not preparing their members for leadership. However, when party representatives were asked whether they were ready to contest all positions in the elections, nearly all the parties were overly confident that they were ready. What remains a mystery is how these parties would be able to successfully wage an election campaign given their inability to raise funds to meet their day-to-day operations. In other words, most parties have no chance in winning real elections and the SPLM remains operationally the most capable party despite the calamity it has brought upon the country through the current war.

This seemingly weak state of the political parties has very serious ramifications on the ability of the parties to exert sufficient pressure to bear on the ruling party and to reach some degree of political consensus. Evidently, the SPLM in the last ten years, as the ruling party, has taken the business of running the state as its own and all others would either have to follow or remain in the cold. When the elite-packed party imploded in 2013, the whole nation suffered and had there been a strong opposition in the country, perhaps the disaster would have been averted, as those discontented with the SPLM and its leadership would have defected to the opposition, which would have been a normal business of the parties.

Political consensus by definition suggests that there must be disagreements among the political forces in the country to invoke the need to build political consensus. The forces must be able to exert enough pressure to compel the other to negotiate and reach a broad understanding. Given the state of the parties just narrated, South Sudan does not have strong political parties. Only the three factions of the SPLM have been able to negotiate sharing of the state power and in that process managed to throw few bone fractures to the other parties. South Sudan is at the state where it disagrees on nearly everything and so there is a need for political forces to res-establish equilibrium and the newly signed peace agreement provides such an opportunity. The real issue is that the other political forces are so weak in the country that they cannot provide countervailing pressure against the SPLM. How could political consensus, even when it is reached, be sustained in such an environment?

V.   The Agreement on the Resolution of the Crisis in South Sudan

The just signed peace agreement is partially an attempt to reconstitute the lost political consensus. The agreement tries to achieve this through the power sharing formula giving the government, the armed opposition, and other political parties slices in the Transitional Government of National Unity (TGoNU). The government takes the largest slice with 53% of the power, SPLM-IO with 33%, SPLM FDs 7% and other political parties taking the other 7% (IGAD, 2015). Assuming that the SPLM Reunification Agreement also known as the Arusha Agreement holds, the agreement effectively gives SPLM 93% power. Unlike the SPLM in the post CPA era, the current SPLM is bitterly divided and clearly lacks a unified national vision. This is the party that will have an absolute control of state power; this has serious consequences on the issue of political consensus and on the question developing multi-party democracy and competitive politics. The SPLM will consolidate its power with all its internal factions essentially negotiating power among them, leaving the other political parties with no real chance to wield any meaningful pressure on the SPLM government.

In the event the SPLM failed to reunite and that the current three factions evolve as new political parties or join the existing parties, then the political landscape in South Sudan would change significantly for better or for worse. South Sudan may have a real opportunity to experience competitive multi-party politics for the first time in its short history. However, this possibility depends on the actions of each party because there is also a real prospect that such political developments could precipitate the return of conflict. The next two years and half are critical, as events will begin to take shape as the country approaches general elections in 2018.

VI.   Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

We have discussed in this paper the need to reconstitute political consensus in South Sudan. Building political consensus is best achieved through political parties that are able to offer policy choices for citizens. South Sudan has a rich history of political parties shaping and defining key policy directions for the people. All the political parties that came to exist in the pre-Addis Ababa Agreement period essentially agreed broadly on the need to bring an end to the subjugation of Southerners by various Khartoum-based regimes. Where differences were registered was the strategy and the methods for achieving this freedom. During the period between 1972 and 1983, it is not so clear what was the defining feature of consensus at the time, other than the usual

politics of winning and losing elections. This may explain why politics became petty and degenerated into ethnic and regional conflicts at the time.

During the SPLM/A era, Southerners still had consensus on the need to break free from the oppressive hands of the Arabs. Like the parties that came before the 1972 agreements, there were marked differences on the strategy to achieve freedom for the people of South Sudan. There were forces calling for an outright separation and those that were calling for fundamental reforms of the Sudan that could foster pluralism, democracy and secularism. These differences were at times acrimonious, causing bitter internal fighting. The CPA ended all this internal fighting among Southerners as they accepted it as the appropriate model to bring about their freedom.

The CPA era was marked by a strong political consensus and unity among Southerners defined primarily by the much anticipated referendum exercise. Still, the 2010 elections created a rather divisive political environment at a time when Southerners were gearing up for the referendum. Owing to the wise leadership at the time, an All-Party Conference was convened in October 2010 to revive the unity and gain consensus among the political forces in South Sudan. This consensus started to dissipate soon after the independence and completely broke down following the events of the December 2013, hence, the need for a new political consensus.

Recommendations

1. The first step in re-establishing political consensus is the recognition that it is absent. The country is embroiled in a brutal conflict now and everything that forms the basis of the country's unity is contested. Therefore, there is need to reconstitute a broad base agreement on these fundamental issues of state formation and nation building such as the constitution and system of governance.
2. The Agreement on the Resolution of Crisis in South Sudan, though inadequate in so many ways, provides an opportunity to pause and reconfigure or bring back the vital signs of our nation. This could be used to rebuild the country's direly needed consensus.
3. The political parties play a critical role in articulating different policy positions on these issues that require general agreement. There is a need to improve the operational environment of the political parties because the just signed peace agreement does not really encourage competitive politics; it seemingly endorses one party dominated politics. Strengthening political parties' capacities requires state intervention, with funding and other operational support need providing.
4. If the SPLM reunification agreement holds, the only way competitive politics could be ensured would be to democratize the SPLM and detach it from the military while developing the capacity of perhaps one or two opposition parties to challenge the SPLM comes the next elections.
5. In the absence of a strong opposition, there is need to convene series of national dialogue conferences that involve political parties, churches and other faith-based institutions, civil society, academics, trade unions, and traditional leadership. The dialogues would serve as platforms for building and consolidating national consensus on the constitution and system of government.
6. It may be necessary for the political parties leadership to revive the interparty dialogue through the Political Parties Leadership Forum (PPLF).

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