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RESEARCH FOR A PEACEFUL, JUST AND PROSPEROUS SOUTH SUDAN

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Policy Brief

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The Flaws in Kate Almquist Knopf's Call for Trusteeship in South Sudan

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Summary

There have been flurries of calls to place South Sudan under the UN trusteeship. The calls come mostly from the U.S. experts, with the most recent one coming from Hon. Kate Almquist Knopf, who testified before the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. These calls ignore the fact that a UN member state cannot be placed under the UN trusteeship system because of sovereign equality of the UN member states. What exactly makes these experts go against such legal stipulations? Knopf justifies her call for trusteeship on the failure of the government to perform key state functions due to lack of legitimate power and institutions. While the negative impact of weak institutions on governance outcomes in South Sudan is indisputable, the central problem the country faces is lack of legitimate peace, not power or institutional illegitimacy, as Knopf suggests. Thus, legitimate institutions or power can be engendered through a peace agreement that enjoys wide acceptance. A legitimate peace can be achieved through broad based dialogues that are South Sudanese driven, free, and frank, and which cater to the key issues of governance, justice and reconciliation. For a sincere, free and fair dialogue to happen we do not need to assume a moral ground and declare any leaders or groups as unwanted to participate. Knopf's suggestion of trusteeship is a manifestation of a long held belief about the South Sudanese: people who are incapable of solving their own problems, therefore, a polity for which the sovereign equality rule of the UN member states cannot be applied. This stems from a western philosophical perspective. However, such framing obstructs efforts towards sustainable and homegrown solution to the prevailing South Sudanese problems of governance. This brief discusses flaws in Knopf's testimony and puts the debate on trusteeship within the western ideological perspective.

Introduction

There have been flurries of calls to place South Sudan under the UN trusteeship in total disregard to the fact that a UN member state cannot be placed under the UN trusteeship because of sovereign equality under the UN Charter.¹ Among those who call for

¹ Article 78 of the UN Charter states that a country that has become a UN member state cannot be placed under the UN Trusteeship System because the relationships between member states are governed by the principle of respect for sovereign equality.
<http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter12.shtml>

trusteeship are highly influential experts from the United States, people who know very well that a UN member state cannot legally be placed under trusteeship. Prominent among those wanting trusteeship are Princeton Lyman,² Former U.S. Special Envoy to South Sudan and Sudan, Hon. Kate Almquist Knopf, Director of the Africa Center for Strategic Studies at the U.S. Department of Defense and Hank Cohen, Former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. Knowing that this would be illegal, why do these experts insist on establishing trusteeship in South Sudan? In other words, why do they think that South Sudan is an exception to the sovereign equality law? Could it be the fact that some of the U.S. experts give the U.S. too much credit for creating South Sudan that they think they also have the right to hand over the country to the UN and the AU?

The answer, according to Kuir e Garang,³ is “the failure of our leadership, death and destruction for the past decade that makes us discuss this topic.” As to the argument that this could create a precedence that could have great implications on sovereignty of other nations in a similar situation, Kuir argues that we should not “worry about other states...it’s neither our problem that they are in crisis and nor is it our problem that they’ve never considered International Trusteeship System.” Kuir’s assertion would fail the test of Kantian ethic, which states that if an action cannot be universally applicable then it is not ethical. In other words, if you cannot place nations in similar situations under the UN trusteeship, then it is not only just illegal it is also unethical. There is no denial about the catastrophe in South Sudan; however, no individual or group of people has the right to decide if South Sudan should be run by the UN or any other foreign body. It is a prerogative of the South Sudanese, who fought and voted to be independent to decide if they should take their country back into the hands of the foreign powers. This paper (1) identifies flaws in Knopf’s testimony to the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and (2) puts the debate on trusteeship within the ideological perspective through which the non-western countries have been viewed in order to understand the philosophical underpinnings of the call for trusteeship in South Sudan. Unraveling philosophical understanding is crucial because the philosophical framing of the South Sudanese stands in the way of finding a homegrown solution.

Flaws in Kate Almquist Knopf’s testimony⁴

While Knopf should be appreciated for her great effort in raising the profile of the suffering of the South Sudanese to the U.S. lawmakers, some of her arguments are dangerously flawed and could actually exacerbate the conflict instead of resolving it. Even though her

² See Lyman, P. and Knopf, K. A. (2016). To Save South Sudan, Put it on Life Support:
<http://africacenter.org/spotlight/save-south-sudan-put-life-support/>

³ Garang, Kuir e (2016). Joint Administration and UN Trusteeship Insulting but not Outlandish – Revisited:
<http://www.kuirthiy.com/2016/07/joint-administration-and-un-trusteeship.html#links>

⁴Knopf, K. A. (2016). U.S. Options as South Sudan Leaders Fail the Peace:
http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/092016_Knopf_Testimony.pdf

arguments and those of her American colleagues can be taken as personal opinions, some of their statements can have huge negative implications on the relations between the United States and South Sudan, particularly the former's ability to exert meaningful influence and leverage on the later. In other words, Knopf's statement combined with the US Congress' decision to invite experts to have expert opinion on the viability of trusteeship in resolving the South Sudanese conflict sends a wrong signal to the South Sudanese State. Trusteeship and other foreign imposed solutions can contribute in a significant way to the deterioration of relationships between the Government of South Sudan and the U.S. Therefore, not only do the proposals for trusteeship or UN administration complicate the matters, they also put the safety of humanitarian workers in danger as these utterances are used by those who have long been suspicious of the U.S.'s role in the current crisis as proof of the regime change agendum. Some international experts and leaders should learn a lesson from the Syrian crisis after reducing a complex Syrian societal problem to a simple matter of removing Bashar al Assad by declaring him, like Knopf did with South Sudanese leaders, as not being part of the solution, an act that further complicated the search for solution to the Syrian crisis.

South Sudanese society is largely a collectivist and communal society. Any individual opinions are rarely differentiated from the institutions and so opinions of individual Americans can hardly be differentiated from that of the U.S. official foreign policy. The Secretary of State, John Kerry, wisely advised that leadership change is the internal issue of the South Sudanese. It was equally wise for Amb. Donald Booth, U.S. Special Envoy to South Sudan and Sudan to suggest that it is not for the U.S. "to tell South Sudan who its leaders should be." This is the position that can put the U.S. in its rightful position as a neutral arbitrator and a friend of South Sudan who can be seen by both sides as objective and interested only in helping the parties reach a lasting solution, instead of the parties looking at it as a ladder to create leverage and advance interest.

Since the conflict started in 2013, the international community seems to have not learned from the implications its mediation policy utterances add to the war dynamics. The international community should realize that a peace mediation carrot or stick is not fair if one side supports it and the other side opposes it. Targeted sanctions, arms embargo, and trusteeship, which have been opposed by the government but supported by the armed opposition, are a case in point.

Knopf argues that it is a myth to believe that power sharing can work in South Sudan, that President Salva Kiir and former 1st Vice President Riek Machar are part of the solution, "that a peacekeeping operation deployed without a workable political arrangement" can bring peace and that it is a myth to believe that "piecemeal, technical investments— financial bailouts, security sector reforms, disarmament and demobilization programs, or

development initiatives are sufficient for confronting South Sudan's systemic failure as a nation state.”

While Knopf tried to debunk the belief in the ability of the South Sudanese to govern themselves or bring change on their own as a myth, she has in the process created her own myths about South Sudan. In other words, the four points she stated as outlined earlier are all flaws. In fact, it is not the power sharing that has failed to work in South Sudan, it is power sharing that is not based on building consensus and trust around key issues of reforms that has not worked. South Sudan has a history of using dialogue to build consensus on key issues and objectives. For example, President Kiir and former 1st Vice President Riek succeeded in sharing power between 2005 and 2010 when they built a consensus through dialogue on the need to work together to exercise the right of self-determination through the referendum. Grassroots people to people dialogue and reconciliation succeeded in reconciling communities after the 1991 devastating split. This grassroots dialogue paved the way for the reconciliation between the political leaders namely John Garang, Riek Machar and Lam Akol, among others. The All Parties Conference that was held in 2010 also helped to build consensus among the political forces to unite for the exercise of self-determination through the referendum in January 2011. However, after the referendum vote, power was shared without building consensus on the issues of governance. The Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (ARCISS) is facing difficulties partly because it was not anchored on a foundation of trust built through a sincere dialogue. Instead, the international community focused on creating two centers of power in the country as the guarantor to the agreement. This proved disastrous in July 2016 when the two forces of the President and former 1st Vice President fought at the State House in Juba while the two leaders were meeting. To try and correct this blunder with another imposed scheme is not only shortsighted, it also constitutes arrogance and manifested ignorance to learn from past experiences.

South Sudanese have no shortage of endogenous proposals and since the conflict started several South Sudanese experts have called for dialogue, that is built on previous experiences, to resolve the conflict. For example, a team from Ebony Center's Development Policy Forum (DPF) proposed a national dialogue in 2014 whose agenda include key issues namely (1) reconstructing the South Sudanese state, (2) new social contract between the people and the state, (3) repatriation, relief, rehabilitation, resettlement and reconstruction, (4) the role of the military in politics, (5) interim government and (6) truth and reconciliation.⁵ While the DPF's proposed framework on national dialogue is inclusive enough and sets out adequate criteria on the participants and

⁵Ebony Center for Strategic Studies (2014). A Conceptual Framework for Resolving the Crisis of Governance and Leadership in South Sudan: http://www.ebonycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/July-30-Version_Conceptual-Framework.pdf

the agenda, it was proposed before the ARCISS and therefore it should be revised to meet the context of ARCISS and new developments since July 2016. Others, such as Majak D'Agoot and Remember Miamingi, have called for national roundtable conference, notwithstanding the fact that they suggest exclusion of the current leaders, bank on strong international military intervention and strengthened JMEC as guarantors,⁶ which are suggestions that could engender resistance against the dialogue itself. Peter Biar Ajak recently called⁷ for a youth led dialogue. All in all, despite the differences in criteria and the agenda, there is a wide consensus about the need for a national dialogue. And for a dialogue to succeed in building trust and consensus on key issues, it should be South Sudanese driven, free, frank, inclusive, and focused on issues instead of personalities. In addition to the participants mentioned in DPF's framework, the international community should be part of the dialogue for it to become a trusted partner in building the nation state of South Sudan. Furthermore, the agenda of the national dialogue should be expanded to include (1) popular constitutional making process as the basis for the new social contract between the state and the people, (2) transparency and accountability, (3) transitional justice in all its aspects, namely trials, truth and reconciliation and reparation, (4) resources sharing, and (5) services delivery.

It is also a myth for Knopf to think that international trusteeship combined with a peacekeeping force will be successful. In fact, all indications point to the fact that such an intrusive international intervention will not be successful. All the countries in which trusteeship was successful that Paul R. Williams cited in his recent submissions⁸ to the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations do not resemble South Sudan in any shape or form. East Timor, Namibia and Kosovo, for instance, received trusteeship assistance before attaining independence and the fact that the UN was on their side throughout their struggles eased its acceptance by the local population and leaders. Other contexts such as Afghanistan and Iraq were independent countries that were invaded militarily and have since eluded stability. Similarly, Cambodia was an independent country that was one of the epicenters of cold war, and whose leaders sought assistance from the UN. Cambodia's case is nearly impossible to replicate in South Sudan due to divisions along ethnic and regional fault lines.

A positive atmosphere existed during the interim period from 2005 and 2011, which would have allowed the UNMIS to exercise neo-trusteeship role effectively. In fact, the role of UNMIS during the interim period was not different in any significant way from the role of UNTAG in Namibia. The diplomatic capital the UN and US and its allies enjoyed in

⁶ D'Agoot, M. and Miamingi, R. (2016). South Sudan: Beyond the logjam of UNSC Resolution 2304.

⁷ Ajak, Peter Biar. (2016). Youth-led National Dialogue: The Only Option to Avert Disaster in South Sudan: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2016/10/12/youth-led-national-dialogue-the-only-option-to-avert-disaster-in-south-sudan/>

⁸ Williams, Paul R. (2016). Submission to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Regarding Neo-Trusteeship in South Sudan.

South Sudan almost parallels the ones in Namibia and East Timor as the population in both places were relying on the assistance from them to achieve their aspirations. The UNTAG in Namibia and UNMIS in Southern Sudan both had election monitoring and state institutions building roles, among others. However, the international community did not utilize this opportunity more appropriately. While UNMISS tried to act in building institutions after independence, there was no diplomatic capital left anymore to have leverage on the South Sudanese officials to cooperate. Doing this after independence was seen as encroaching on the sovereignty. While the UNMIS feared to prepare South Sudan on ground of accusation of preferring separation⁹, this excuse is unsatisfactory as the CPA provided the options of either separation or unity. Either way, South Sudan needed strong institutions. Moreover, the international community, particularly the UNMISS, no longer enjoys broad based acceptance, as it has been accused several times by both sides to the conflict.

Besides, it is inaccurate for Knopf to suggest that “piecemeal, technical investments—financial bailouts, security sector reforms, disarmament and demobilization programs, or development initiatives are [not] sufficient for confronting South Sudan’s systemic failure as a nation state”. It is the application of these approaches without mentoring South Sudanese in a manner that could practically transfer state institutional building skills, ethic and culture to South Sudanese civil servants and top policymakers that is insufficient. For example, during the interim period and before the crisis, “almost every single institution of the government of South Sudan has had a foreign advisor to give technical support on how to run a government and instead of training the South Sudanese in anticipation of long-term transitions, many consultants took on the role of government employees, literally directing government departments/institutions, writing institutional reports, policies, regulations and legislation.¹⁰” In fact, these efforts led to many good laws and policies that have seen little implementation due in part to lack of internalization of the laws and policies as they were written and handed to them by foreign experts. Policymakers can have little understanding and emotional motivation to implement policies whose thinking and writing were done by somebody else. Foreign built institutions without prioritizing the best interest of the local population through empowerment, participation and alignment of the assistance with government plans do not seem to work once the foreigners leave. Otherwise African governments would have picked up where the colonial powers left off. So, the real myth is the assumption that the UN and African Union can do it better. Even if they were able to build the institutions better, would they function after they leave?

While Knopf diagnoses the persistency of “War and conflict in South Sudan” as being caused by “a complete deficit of legitimate power and legitimate institutions,” Ms. Knopf

⁹ Johnson, Hilde. (2016). South Sudan: The Untold Story

¹⁰ Tiitmamer, N. and Awolich, A. (2014). South Sudan’s Crisis: A UN Trusteeship or Joint Administration is Outlandish. Weekly Review: The Sudd Institute.

terribly fails to realize that a foreign administration over South Sudan is an issue that equally divides South Sudanese along ethnic and regional fault lines. Therefore, a divisive approach cannot create legitimate power and institutions. If the current institutions staffed by South Sudanese are not legitimate, what makes a foreign trusteeship legitimate? British trusteeship in the form of close districts was not legitimate, yet it was dubbed as a way to protect South Sudanese from the Arabs, as well as a way to modernize them. The tutelage under the Arab North was not legitimate, yet the southern region was left in the hands of the Arab North so that it could develop capacity. What Ms. Knopf should realize is that South Sudanese just gained their independence through blood and so they will not easily hand over their country to another foreign power.

Ms. Knopf's assertion that South Sudanese leaders do not want peace is not entirely true as the speeches of these leaders indicate they want peace, but on their own terms. It is normal in the peace process for parties to sign a peace agreement that secures their key bottom lines. However, ARCISS was poorly designed and was imposed on the parties instead of them negotiating it to arrive at reasonable and true compromise. The international partners focused on flexing their coercion muscles at the expense of exploring and putting into consideration the role of ripeness¹¹ in attaining and sustaining a peace settlement, as well as the role of incentives and soft power. The fighting that happened between the bodyguards of the two leaders in July 2016 was a result of the flaws in the agreement that ignored building trust but instead focussed on misguided deterrence measures by creating two centers of power and two armies together in the same city. Because of lack of trust and because the agreement was not based on true compromise, signing the peace agreement was postponement of the war to be fought another day. The insistence of the conflict is not because of lack of legitimate power and institutions. Legitimate institutions or power can be created through the peace agreement, but the ARCISS, by the time it was signed, lacked key ingredients that make a peace agreement stick¹². Therefore, the problem is lack of a legitimate peace – a peace agreement that all the parties truly agree to and support. As discussed earlier, a legitimate peace that can create legitimate institutions can be created through broad based South Sudanese dialogue to build common ground on key issues of governance, justice and reconciliation.

Third, Knopf simply falls victim to the dangerous South Sudanese elite propaganda that simply characterizes the conflict as Dinka versus Nuer and Dinka versus Equatoria when this is more complex than it is portrayed. In particular, Knopf's statement that "attempts to mischaracterize the UN and AU transitional administration as a violation of South Sudan's sovereignty or an attempt at neocolonialism are inevitable, particularly from the most hardline Dinka elements in the country who benefit—financially and politically—

¹¹ IBID

¹² Hampson, F. O. (1996). *Nurturing Peace: Why Peace Settlements Succeed or Fail*. The United States Institute of Peace.

from the current” is just an absolute insult to many independent minded South Sudanese who oppose the trusteeship not because they “benefit financially and politically from the current situation.” It is an old school tactic of preemptively intimidating people to not raise their opinions against one’s misconceived understanding. Knopf should be reminded that Southern Sudanese volunteered and gave their lives for independence between 1955 and 2005 against foreigners without pay and so there is no reason they should not oppose any move they see as encroaching on their hard won sovereignty now.

The Philosophy Behind Trusteeship on South Sudan

In our last discussion, Eng. Paul Adong neatly captured various viewpoints on how to address our current crisis into three main schools of thought which include: (1) those that have lost faith in our ability (or leaders’ ability) to govern South Sudan, (2) those who use cautious approach to question the practicality and effectiveness of any proposed experiments wrapped up as a magic baton and (3) those (mostly opposition politicians) who see the international intervention as an opportunity for regime change. Makau Mutua, a renowned Kenyan Law Professor, recently linked the thinking behind the call for trusteeship in South Sudan to Afro-pessimistic worldview¹³. Afro-pessimism is a manifestation of mental colonization which the prolific Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong’o describes as having destroyed “a people’s belief in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves.¹⁴” It is rooted in the western worldview of “others,” which looks at Africa as a place that is inhabited by incapable people that only need help.

We would like to further expand on these various schools of thought by exploring the ideological foundation informing them. The first and the third schools of thought are fueled by the Afro-pessimistic worldview, which looks at Africa as a hopeless continent that should be recolonized or put under international system to save it from diseases, crisis of governance and underdevelopment.¹⁵ Following the independence of Sudan from British,

¹³ Mutua, Makau. (2016). The tragedy that is South Sudan and warring elite:

<http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2000213658/the-tragedy-that-is-south-sudan-and-warring-elite>

¹⁴ Thiong’o, Ngugi wa. (1986). Decolonizing the Minds: The Politics of Language in African Literature.

¹⁵ Kaplan, R. (1994). The Coming Anarchy. *Atlantic Monthly*: 44–76.

———. (1992). "Continental Drift." *New Republic*: 15.

Michaels, M. (1993). Retreat from Africa. *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 1: 93–108.

Johnson, P. (1993). Colonialism's Back and Not a Moment Too Soon. *New York Times Magazine*: 22.

Hitchens, C. (1994). Africa without Pity." *Vanity Fair*: 43–52.

This also falls in line with argument by Donald Trump, 2016 U.S. Republican Presidential Candidate in which he claimed that “There is no shortcut to maturity and in my view, Africa should be recolonized because Africans are still under slavery. Look at how those African leaders change constitutions in their favor so that they can be live presidents.” See <http://howafrica.com/there-is-no-shortcut-to-maturity-africa-should-be-recolonized-says-donaldtrump/>

the self-elected Arab Sudanese elites inherited the pessimistic view about the South Sudanese ability to govern themselves.

Afro-pessimism and its origin

Some lines of thought by the English Philosopher John Stuart Mill¹⁶ are worth citing as western views that have influenced Afro-pessimism, and of course colonialism and this idea of trusteeship. While Mill has made great contributions in the area of individual freedom and sovereignty of nation states, particularly with regards to non-interference, he, however, made some exceptions, especially for what he considered immature persons and/or uncivilized societies as not deserving freedom and sovereignty. For example, while arguing that the individual's "independence is, of right, absolute over himself, his body and his mind," Mill argued that this doctrine applies "only to human beings in the maturity of their faculties." In other words, those who are exempted from this principle of individual autonomy are those whose faculties are considered to be immature, including (1) children below legal age, (2) those still in the backward condition who are being taken care of by others, including being "protected against their own actions as well as against external inquiry" and (3) "those backward states of society in which the race itself may be considered as in its nonage." He argued that difficulties that bar progress in backward societies are so great that a leader is left with very limited means to overcome them and is therefore "warranted" to use any means to attain the desired end so long as this end is for their improvement.

He maintains, "Despotism is a legitimate mode of a government dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement, and the means justified by actually effecting that end." Mill reasons that the principle of sovereignty is only applicable to civilized nations, not to "barbarous nations." In other words, "independence and nationality," according to him, are important for the "growth and development" of "a people further advanced in improvement" but not for those without western standards. Simply put, colonialism was justified through this world-view that Africans are not capable of governing themselves where several deadly conflicts and lack of development on the continent has been used to justify why the outside world should intervene.

Therefore, the proposal to place South Sudan under the UN trusteeship, despite the fact that it is not legally possible, is grounded in this Mill's exceptions in the application of the principle of respect for individual freedom, autonomy and sovereignty of nation states. That the U.S. top policy experts suggest trusteeship and that its lawmaking body could hold a hearing on viability of placing an independent UN member state under the UN trusteeship can be understood from a philosophical lens through which the non-western countries are seen. The proponents look at trusteeship as something that improves the

¹⁶ Mill, John Stuart. (1859). On Liberty and other Essays.

wellbeing of South Sudanese who are considered incapable of solving their own problems. The fact that South Sudan is the last of the third world countries to gain independence makes the matters even worse as it makes those influenced knowingly or unknowingly by Mill's exceptionalism principle brave enough to propose an application of such an illegal endeavor.

Mill's exceptionalism paradigm and despotism in Africa

Mill's exceptionalism principle has had serious negative impacts on individual freedom and sovereignty of nation states in Africa in two main ways. First, the colonialists in Africa used this line of thought to suppress dissenting voices, particularly those that object to inhuman treatments of African people on the basis that this supposedly improves their wellbeing. Second, after the colonialists left, the leaders of the newly independent countries inherited the idea that despotism is the legitimate government tool to deal with barbarians. This line of thought immediately turned some of the African liberation heroes into villains who became the oppressors of their own people by assuming the all knowing position of the colonialists. Some governments in Africa, whether in Juba or in other African capitals, have knowingly or unknowingly, been operating on this philosophical line of thought, which is that the government knows what is good for the citizens because the citizens are assumed not mature enough to think about what is good for themselves. The SPLM demonstrated this well in the 2010 elections, during which it handpicked candidates for various positions.

In essence, proponents of trusteeship, such as Knopf, have lost hope in the ability of the South Sudanese to turn things around because the leaders have assumed an all knowing position and are using the Millian idea of despotism as a tool to deal with citizens who may be dissatisfied with the state of affairs. It is also on this assumption that those opposed to the government use violent means because if they use civilized methods, they may be brutally dealt with.

Conclusion

The foregoing lines of thought from Mill inform the Afro-pessimistic worldview, which is being used to look at the South Sudanese crisis. This philosophical framing obstructs efforts towards finding a homegrown solution to the local crisis. The problem with the Afro-pessimistic worldview is that it does not consider the multidimensional contextual factors and is quick to rule out the possibility of Africans being able to find solutions to their own problems, because they are believed to be incapable of doing so. It looks at foreigners, particularly westerners, as the saviors. This worldview is partly responsible for failure to solve many problems in Africa in general and in South Sudan in particular, as people are divided along the lines of those who believe the locals have the primary responsibility to solve their own problems and those who do not draw the line between what the outsiders

can and cannot do. What makes the matters even worse is that these divisions do not remain ideological. They spill into tribal space where tribes are violently divided along fault lines, to the extent that if foreigners intervene, they are no longer seen as true mediators but partisan actors to the internal conflicts. Therefore, we have the view that foreigners should be careful in their quest to intervene in conflict in divided societies such as South Sudan because if they are perceived as having taken side, it complicates and worsens the conflicts as it has happened in Syria and Libya.

Everything has a limit and international intervention is of no exception. If an international intervention limit is exceeded, the conflict becomes international and further becomes complicated to resolve. In our response to Lyman et al.'s call for trusteeship in 2014, we¹⁷ clearly stated the limit of international intervention by arguing that the international community should only be required to help “with mediation processes, protection of civilians, provision of humanitarian services, and exertion of positive pressure on the parties to end the violence and reach a comprehensive, home-grown political settlement.” Any assumption of political role or any act that advances one party’s interest at the expense of the other or anything beyond the roles stated above internationalizes the conflict and makes it more complex to resolve.

Given how deeply communities are divided along ethnic and regional fault lines, trusteeship won’t be effective in South Sudan. In addition, the relationships between the international community and South Sudanese government has eroded over the years and therefore, trusteeship won’t receive wide acceptance, a factor necessary for trusteeship to succeed. What can work in South Sudan’s case is national dialogue on key issues of governance, justice and reconciliation, conducted in a manner that can deescalate the conflict, build trust and restore stability. For it to be successful, the dialogue should be South Sudanese driven, frank, free, inclusive and should focus on issues, instead of personalities. A sincere and fair dialogue should require that nobody must assume a moral ground and declare any leader or group as unwanted to participate. The international community can support the South Sudanese dialogue without interfering too much in a way that may make communities lose confidence in their own ability to put their house in order. Ms. Knopf and others with similar thoughts should therefore support endogenous peace-building processes.

About Sudd Institute

¹⁷ Tiitmamer, N and Awolich, A. (2014). Alternatives to UN Trusteeship and Joint Administration Proposals Provided: A Response to Kuir Garang. Weekly Review: The Sudd Institute.

The Sudd Institute is an independent research organization that conducts and facilitates policy relevant research and training to inform public policy and practice, to create opportunities for discussion and debate, and to improve analytical capacity in South Sudan. The Sudd Institute’s intention is to significantly improve the quality, impact, and accountability of local, national, and international policy- and decision-making in South Sudan in order to promote a more peaceful, just and prosperous society.

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