



THE SUDD INSTITUTE

RESEARCH FOR A PEACEFUL, JUST AND PROSPEROUS SOUTH SUDAN

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WEEKLY REVIEW

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President Salva Kiir's Visit to Khartoum

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President Salva Kiir Mayardit's recent visit to Khartoum came following a government dissolution that saw the entire cabinet sacked. The reshuffle of the cabinet was well received by the public given number of high profile purported corruption cases in the old cabinet and a political stalemate within the government. The cabinet dissolution included unprecedented sacking of the Vice President, Dr. Riek Machar, which was received with mixed reactions in the public, creating a confused and potentially explosive political environment. The dissolved cabinet was, mostly, made up of senior members of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), who purportedly had formed a political block within the party in opposition to the President. The said block pulled off an unexpected win in a cabinet vetting showdown in the parliament against the President when they rejected a presidential nominee for the Ministry of Justice, the former presidential advisor, Telar Deng. The move is seen by many as more than just a gentle slap on the wrist of the President and signaling the beginning of a political battle among the SPLM heavyweights after the fallout following the reshuffle.

The government overhaul spilled over to the party when the President suspended the long serving SPLM Secretary General, Pagan Amum. At the time of his suspension, Mr. Amum was also the lead negotiator for South Sudan on the post-CPA unresolved issues with the Sudan and he was particularly loathed in some quarters in Khartoum for his alleged dogmatic approach to negotiation. He is under investigation on charges of alleged insubordination and public incitement, all of which he denies. He is reportedly barred from either traveling outside the country or speaking to the media.

The visit of the President also follows a similar visit of President Omar Hassan el Bashir to Juba in April 2013. The overarching reason for the Presidential Summit in Khartoum was to normalize relationships between South Sudan and Sudan including the need to continue the flow of South Sudan oil. And the time chosen to meet in Khartoum could not have been any better in light of the recent political changes in South Sudan. Both Kiir and Bashir are under immense political and economic pressures domestically and internationally to normalize relationships

between their two countries. It appears that President Kiir is giving in to this pressure and the recent reshuffle seems to have heralded a new political era in the country. The reshuffle seems to target SPLM diehards, who are sympathetic to their former comrades in the SPLM-North in Southern Kordofan and Southern Blue Nile. Kiir's new cabinet however, is made up largely of former diehards of Bashir's National Congress Party (NCP) among which Dr. Riek Gai is the most prominent. The newly elected Speaker of the National Legislative Assembly is also a new convert to the SPLM from the NCP. He and the recently appointed Governor of Unity State are reported to be political allies of Riek Gai. This move suggests a political shift in the SPLM to warm up to former Bashir's party members as a way to ease Khartoum's fears. This of course is at the expense of those seen as opposed to the regime in Khartoum. Although it was a very important visit to make in order to give the much-needed momentum to the rocky and often unpredictable relationship between the two Sudans, some analysts think that the President made the move in order to deflect attention away from the domestic political quagmires within his own party.

The Sudd Institute this week analyzes the net gain from the visit of President Kiir to Khartoum, the driving factors behind the move to hold the Presidential Summit and the potential political backlash resulting from changing national political landscapes in South Sudan.

The much-hyped Presidential Summit between the two countries was hoped to achieve four objectives. First, it was hoped that the summit would allay Khartoum's fears about South Sudan's support for the rebels, which triggered Khartoum's threat to shut the oil down once again. Second, the meeting was expected to tackle border disputes and enable the demarcation process to continue unabated. Third, it was expected to achieve a breakthrough over the stalled issue of Abyei referendum. Finally, the presidential summit was expected to restore the economic relations between the two countries including opening all borders for trade and free movement of the people and animals.

One of the things achieved by the visit of the President to the Sudan is the verbal agreement reached with the Sudanese President on continued oil flow to the international market. Oil is central to the two countries' relationship for several reasons. The fledgling economies of the two countries are largely dependent on the poorly developed oil industry. This is evident in how the two countries responded when they both lost income due to the shut down of oil flow in January 2012. Both Juba and Khartoum introduced austerity budgets to deal with the new economic realities. Civil servants in South Sudan have experienced delays in their salaries. Poverty is at its peak and the public is increasingly becoming impatient due to lack of basic services, high prices of basic consumer commodities and economic stagnation.

To address these pressing issues, President Kiir had to make this visit to Khartoum.

Khartoum on the other hand has been suffering from economic downturn brought about by the loss of oil revenue that starved it of the much-needed hard currency and cash to finance its national budget. The government in Sudan has since implemented austerity measures and contemplating to scrape subsidies on fuel and other basic consumer goods. The effect of such economic policy is a predictable increase in the prices of goods beyond what most ordinary Sudanese could afford and will push the country to the brink of economic insecurity and violence. The regime in Khartoum also needs money to continue battling various Sudanese rebel groups that are fighting to topple it.

Although the Presidential Summit underachieved in terms of what was expected, a partial agreement is still good for both countries. Sudan will benefit from the transit fees, charges on processing of the oil and additional cash payments to cushion Khartoum's loss of revenue following South Sudan's secession. After the resumption of oil flow in May 2013, South Sudan has so far received one billion US dollars from sales of its crude oil. The flow of oil achieve mutually beneficial economic and political interests for both countries

However, other than the said economic interests, little has been achieved in terms of resolving issues to do with the contested border areas and the implementation of the safe demilitarized border zones. The Abyei referendum was not even an agenda for discussions during the meeting between the two Presidents - much to the disappointment of the Dinka Ngok whose scheduled referendum may not be implemented. The issue also provoked the chairperson of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee to renew a call, in no uncertain terms, for the referendum to go ahead as proposed by the African Union High Implementation Panel (AUHIP). The signal from the British Ambassador to the United Nations, Mark Lyall Grant, suggesting that his government would not accept unilateral decision on Abyei issue by any of the two countries disappointingly seems to be the stand of the international community.

As usual, no agreement between the two countries stands a chance to be implemented in good faith. Barely two days after President Salva Kiir Mayardit's visit, the Sudanese fighter jets bombed Jau in Unity State, killing two people and wounding six others. This incident came following the commitments of the two Presidents to peaceful co-existence and good neighborly relations between the two countries. This, of course, is not the first time that Khartoum carried out attacks on South Sudanese territory after concluding agreements. But bombing Jau only 48 hours after the Kiir-Bashir meeting is a clear indication that Khartoum might not exactly be interested in either resolving the post-CPA issues through a negotiated settlement or in normalizing relations with South Sudan.

The growing expedient relationship between President Kiir and President Bashir leaves the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement – North (SPLA/M-N) and its allied Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF) in a political limbo. Kiir promises not to allow these rebel groups to use South Sudanese borders to fight Bashir's regime.

The move by South Sudan to sever links with SPLA/M-N is to stop Khartoum from supporting rebels fighting the SPLM led government in Juba and to continue the flow of the lifeblood of the two economies, the oil. President Kiir, however, has managed to thwart the Khartoum backed rebels by extending a blanket amnesty to all rebels, an offer which most of the rebel groups have accepted. And at the moment, it looks like SPLA/M-N and SRF fighting the government of Sudan and the rebels fighting the government of South Sudan are the sacrificial lambs of national and geopolitical interests.

In conclusion, Kiir's visit to Khartoum seems to have secured the continuation of the oil flow to the international market. It also managed to turn the attention of the public away from the political struggle within his government and the leadership wrangles within his ruling party, the SPLM. Other pressing issues like the Abyei referendum, the disputed border areas and the demilitarized border zones were left untouched. In light of all this, it is recommended that:

- Presidential Summits be preceded by adequate preparation including agreeing on the agenda prior to getting the President to attend.
- It appears that South Sudan is using a defensive diplomacy since the attack on Panthou, it needs to go on a diplomatic offensive to get Khartoum to justify its actions at the border and stop blackmailing South Sudan with the threat of oil shutdown.
- South Sudan needs a very strong and firm stand on Abyei and if the stand is to go forward with the referendum as scheduled, unilaterally, citizens should be prepared adequately for the possibility of war over Abyei including potential international response ramifications.
- If the African Union cannot enforce its decisions on member states, such as its decision on the final status of Abyei, is it still a legitimate arbitrator on the issue or should other arbitrators be sought after?
- South Sudan needs to take a decision to find another means of getting its oil to the market to escape Khartoum's capricious leadership.

About the Author

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About 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.