



THE SUDD INSTITUTE

RESEARCH FOR A PEACEFUL, JUST AND PROSPEROUS SOUTH SUDAN

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Weekly Review

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Bashir's Official Visit: What It Means for the two Sudans

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Friday April 12, 2013 was one of those memorable days not for good reasons as the South Sudanese woke up to an unannounced curfew. Nearly, the whole town of Juba was basically locked down in anticipation of the arrival of the Sudanese President, Omar Al Bashir, on his first official visit after the declaration of South Sudanese independence in 2011. The visit followed the signing of the Cooperation Agreements on the 27th of September 2012 and the subsequent signing of the Implementation Matrix on the 12th of March 2013. The Sudd Institute wrote both on Bashir's then planned visit and the Cooperation Agreements. This week's review looks at Bashir's visit in terms of the normalization of relations between the two countries and the public reaction to this.

Bashir's visit was planned to happen immediately after the signing of the agreements last year as an attempt to normalize diplomatic and economic relations with South Sudan, but the grievous mistrust between the two countries saw the plan fell through. The signing of the Implementation Matrix, however, revived the almost forgotten Cooperation Agreements, eventually leading to President Bashir's visit. The visit drew wide-ranging reactions from the public, with some angered by the visit on the grounds of ICC outstanding arrest warrant. These people maintain that South Sudan should not, as a matter of moral principle, welcome an internationally indicted president who has a blood of millions of South Sudanese and their kins in Darfur, Blue Nile, and South Kordufan, in his hands. Yet, others complained that Bashir and Sudan should have done more to implement parts of the agreements to demonstrate serious commitment before his visit to South Sudan. For example, Bashir should have apologized to the people of South Sudan for his wanton comments last year, calling South Sudanese "insects", open the border and trade between the two countries, or make a major concession on Abyei.

There are even some who believe that this visit is a political ploy as Bashir may be planning an invasion of South Sudan to occupy disputed territories, particularly Mile 14 area. The proponents of this view argue that it is the same Bashir who gave a very nice speech on the occasion of the declaration of independence nearly two years ago and the next thing people knew were bombs raining on them. These concerns are based, of course, on the incessant aerial bombardments at the border and regular ground incursions into South Sudan territories, ongoing fighting with presumably Sudan backed rebels of David Yau Yau and other security incidents that cast shadow over the recent diplomatic gestures from

Khartoum.

Another group holds the view that there are thorny domestic political wrangles in the Republic of Sudan, particularly the power struggles within the NCP that might have as a matter of political expediency, convinced President Bashir to make peace with South Sudan at least temporarily in order to reassert his authority and salvage his reputation and that of his party. Recent months have seen a lot of political upheavals in Sudan, including the purported coup led by former head of NISS, and now there appears to be a growing fractionalization along religious lines in Khartoum, with hardliner members of the NCP becoming even more vocal or critical. These internal woes within the ruling party and the growing threat from myriad rebellions make the current political situation untenable for President Bashir and his cohorts, so he might have needed a rapprochement with South Sudan to rally a dwindling domestic and international support.

Understandably, some residents of Juba, particularly in the business community, were exasperated by the whole day curfew that led to millions of pounds in business being lost. They did not understand why the whole town had to be shut down just because a cantankerous neighbor decided to visit with only a smile on his face. Perhaps, the officials need to balance the need to keep the businesses and the city running while also ensuring the security of a visiting national guest next time. Locking down the entire economy on this basis was unnecessary and does not serve South Sudanese national strategic interest.

Lastly, there were few voices in the public and the political establishment who believed that the visit was necessary to defuse the political tensions and move away from bellicose rhetoric that has come to dominate the relations between the countries since independence and establish a relationship based on cooperation, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence. In their view, the people of South Sudan, in the interest of peace, should swallow their pride with the hope that Bashir, on his official visit, would do the following:

- Declare his commitment to form Abyei Administration Council and conduct Abyei Referendum without conditions.
- Reaffirm the commitment of his government to establish a sustainable mutual relationship with the Republic of South Sudan.
- Denounce and cease his support for South Sudanese Rebels immediately.
- Cease aerial bombardments and ground incursions into South Sudan's territories with immediate effect.
- Reopen the border crossings and trade between the two countries.
- Pledge to implement all outstanding agreements without preconditions and negotiate the remaining issues in good faith.
- Promise not to steal the South Sudanese oil when the pipes reopen.

President Bashir, instead of delivering on these hopes, behaved as usual, demonstrating exactly the typical behavior of all Khartoum-based regimes. He dismissed and refused to apologize to the South Sudanese for calling them insects, refused to make any deal on Abyei's permanent status, denied his connection with the rebels, and said nothing about aerial bombardments and ground incursions into the South Sudanese territories.

As usual, he agreed to implement the existing agreements and promised to continue the endless discussions on border, Abyei, and the other disputed territories. He did announce the opening of the borders, resumption of trade, agreed to form the Abyei Administration and Council, and agreed to negotiate in the future and improve cooperation between the two countries. These plans, if of course implemented, would help create promising relations, leading to sorely needed tranquility and prosperity between the two countries.

One question that remains pertinent is whether Bashir's visit will change the status quo that has seen the two countries wishing each other doom, a rhetoric that is all too malicious for the future of both sides. It remains to be seen whether the visit was an overture for a new direction or a lull to the fiery situation that can go ablaze in a moment's notice. Bashir has placed himself perfectly in that position to turn the button on or off as his moods and political desires normally dictate. As for South Sudanese, it is one eye on the sky and another on the border as they wait for the push of the button. The truth is, Bashir's visit, if he meant well, could be the beginning of improved relations between the two countries, a recipe for peace, stability, and prosperity in both societies.

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.

About the Author

Abraham Awolich is a founding member of the Sudd Institute and currently runs administration and finance department. Awolich is a policy analyst and his research interests are in public administration, development, decentralization, NGO and public management, budgeting and public finance, community development, organizational justice and all poverty related issues. Prior to joining the Sudd Institute, Awolich was a consultant for the Government of South Sudan conducting the Comprehensive Evaluation that looked at systems, structures, and government inter-linkages of the GoSS during the interim period.