

The Birth of a New Nation: The Republic of South Sudan

Samuel Totten

In early July, the country of Sudan, wracked by civil war since the 1980s, officially split into two separate nations, Sudan and South Sudan. Six months earlier, over a seven-day period, the people in southern Sudan had voted in a national referendum on whether to secede from the North. The voters had two choices: “Separation” or “Unity.” For the vote to be valid, 60 percent of registered voters had to participate. For the referendum to pass, a simple majority had to vote in favor of independence.

The referendum came about as a result of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed between the North (whose population is predominantly Arab and Muslim) and the South (whose population largely identify as African and are mostly Christians and followers of traditional animist religions). The two sides had engaged in internecine warfare, off and on since 1955. During Sudan’s second civil war (1983–2003), an estimated two million people died as a result of war, famine, and disease. Some four million others were internally displaced and another 600,000 became refugees.

Ever since Sudan’s independence from the UK in 1956,¹ power had been concentrated in the hands of the elite in Khartoum (or the North). As a result, Arabic replaced English in the South as the language of administration, and Arab officials from the North assumed positions of power in the South (thus reversing a colonial policy against Muslim domination of the South). This created immense discord in the South, which was further aggravated by Khartoum’s repressive rule, and by the central government’s discrimination against Christians and adherents of traditional religions.

The North controlled the resources of

the South, extracting both oil and water at will, and refused to invest the oil revenues in southern Sudan. South Sudan is one of the least developed and most poverty-stricken regions in the world. According to the World Bank, in the North, 46 percent live below the poverty line, in the South that figure is 85 percent.² According to humanitarian groups, a 15-year old girl in south Sudan is more likely to die during childbirth than finish school. In an area roughly the size of Belgium and France combined, south Sudan has a grand total of 40 kilometers (or 24 miles) of paved road.

The African population of the South felt increasingly marginalized and discriminated against by the Arabs of the North. In 1983, Sudanese President Ga’afar Nimeiry declared that Sudan was to be an Islamic state. This increased the sense of marginalization of both Christians and followers of traditional religions in the South, and resulted in further discrimination against them. As a result of the Islamization of Sudan, *Shari’a* (fundamentalist Islamic Law) was instituted, and resulted in such punishments as amputations for theft and public lashings for an array of offenses.

Ultimately, resentment in the South grew to the point that a rebel group was

formed, the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). Founded in 1983, it fought for self government and equal rights for the people of the South. During the brutal civil war, southern villages were destroyed, southerners were enslaved, churches were wrecked, and traditional religious practices suppressed by forces fighting for the North.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement

A long series of diplomatic efforts throughout the 1990s by leaders from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Kenya, ultimately led to the signing of a series of agreements between the government of Sudan and the rebels that ended the Sudanese civil war. In July 2002, the government and the SPLM/A agreed to sign the Machakos Protocol, which established the right of southern Sudan to pursue self-determination. Following another round of diplomacy, largely under the auspices of the United Nations, on November 19, 2004, the two sides signed a declaration committing to a final comprehensive peace agreement by December 31, 2004.

Under the auspices and mediation of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (a coalition of six African countries focused on drought prevention and development), the government of Sudan and the SPLM/A signed the following six agreements to finalize the Comprehensive Peace Agreement: The Protocol of Machakos (July 20, 2002); The Protocol on Security Arrangements

A woman carries a South Sudan flag as she arrives at the John Garang Mausoleum for Independence Day celebrations in the capital, Juba, July 9, 2011. Reuters/Thomas Mukoya.



(September 25, 2003); The Protocol on Wealth-Sharing (January 7, 2004); The Protocol on Power Sharing (May 26, 2004); The Protocol on the Resolution of Conflict in Southern Kordofan/Nuba Mountains and the Blue Nile States (May 26, 2004); and The Protocol on the Resolution of Conflict in Abyei (May 26, 2004).³

Ultimately, with the ongoing support of the United Nations and its various bodies, the first vice-president of Sudan, Ali Osman Taha, and the chairman of the SPLM/A, John Garang,⁴ worked out a bevy of additional issues that led to the finalization of the peace agreement on January 9, 2005.

Secession and the Formation of a New Nation

The people of the newly formed Republic of South Sudan hope to gain a lot from their secession, including, at a minimum, freedom from a brutal dictatorship; freedom of religion for Muslims, Christians,

and animists; more educational and financial opportunities; and the freedom to build an inclusive, democratic nation.

The fact that the South is sitting on incredibly rich deposits of oil only bolsters the high hopes of the South Sudanese. There is fear, however, that unrealistic expectations could lead to new outbreaks of violence in the South if expectations are not met. This is only one of numerous challenges laying ahead for the new nation.

Potential Crisis Points

The birth of any nation is pregnant with possibility and fraught with potential crisis, and this is even more true when that nation is situated on the poorest continent on Earth. Added to this is the fact that the Republic of South Sudan is separating from one of the most ill-governed nations in Africa—one that is notorious for the disenfranchisement of its people in all aspects of life, including basic civil and political rights (including fair representa-

tion in the governing of the nation), health care, education, and employment.

Political analysts have cited at least 11 potential problems facing the new nation: (1) a renewed war ignited by the North/Khartoum as a result of secession; (2) a violent and prolonged dispute with the North over how to share the wealth of oil deposits in Abyei, a city that straddles both North and South; (3) the possibility that leaders of the new government will primarily look out for themselves and their own; (4) that the new government might not act quickly enough to meet the mounting expectations of the people; (5) that traditional antagonisms between various tribal groups (e.g., the Dinka and the Equatorians, and the Ngok Dinka and the Misseriya, a northern tribe of Arab nomads) may flare up, fueling violence, and ripping apart the fabric of the new nation; (6) the ongoing and overwhelmingly massive return of people from the North and elsewhere, which is placing an enormous strain on the limited resources

(water, housing, health care, food) of the new nation; (7) a lack of law and order in an area accustomed to being on a war footing and saturated with weapons; (8) that the desire by those in the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile region for freedom from the North has fueled rising tensions, increasing the possibility of war; (9) the ongoing crisis in Darfur, which is still governed by the North, may re-explode, which could inflame tensions between the North and South; (10) a coup d'état in Khartoum against current president Omar al Bashir, by those against the peace agreement thus resulting in the division of the country;⁵ and (11) the possibility that nations in the region, such as Kenya and Uganda, rushing in to capitalize on opportunities to erect infrastructure for the new country might do this in a predatory (or neo colonialist) manner rather than with the new nation's best interest at heart.

It is unclear which, if any, of these political flash points will indeed explode into a major problem. Nevertheless, the international community must be proactive in addressing such potential conflicts.

Bright Points

Unlike the 20-year war that took the lives of some two million people and was all but ignored by the world community, many eyes have been focused on the events unfolding in Sudan today. Indeed, the United Nations, individual countries (including the United States), the media, human rights activists, scholars, nongovernmental organizations, and celebrities (such as George Clooney and Mia Farrow) have been vocal and present as the peace agreement and referendum unfolded.

Jimmy Carter and the Carter Center monitored the voting during the referendum; Clooney acted as an unofficial ambassador of peace; news coverage has been extensive; and UN peacekeepers are spread out across the South while NGOs are providing experts on water, health, and refugee flows.

The Results of the Referendum

During the course of the referendum, it was



Map No. 3707 Rev. 13 UNITED NATIONS Department of Peacekeeping Operations Cartographic Section April 2007



Names and boundary representation are not necessarily authoritative 365 7-11 STATE (UN)

Top: A map of Sudan, prior to the July split of the North and South.
Bottom: The new nation of South Sudan.

Rumors of War in the Nuba Mountains¹

Samuel Totten

We want our freedom too, and we are ready to fight for it. And if we have to we will create our own nation, and we will take our fight to Khartoum this time.

—an SPLA soldier in the Nuba Mountains, in a conversation with Samuel Totten, January 19, 2011.

Although the people of the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile region fought side-by-side with the people of the South during the 20-year civil war against the North, they were denied the right to vote in the January 2011 referendum on whether Sudan would become two separate nations. (On July 9, the new nation of South Sudan was formally welcomed into the community of nations.) Due to political compromises during the creation and finalization of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the North and South, the Nuba Mountains people were left out of the final agreement. The situation in the Nuba Mountains remains volatile and unstable. The Nuba identify themselves as Nuba Africans, a people who are distinct from the Arabs of North Sudan. The population in the mountains is religiously mixed, consisting of Muslims, Christians and followers of traditional religions. The friction between them and the government of the North makes the Nuba Mountains one of the potential flashpoints that could prevent the Comprehensive Peace Agreement from inaugurating an era of peace and stability in the region.

I flew into the Nuba Mountains, South Kordofan, from Nairobi on a DC 3 belonging to a nongovernmental organization (NGO) and stayed for two weeks, between January 5th and January 20th. I camped out at the compound of the NGO, whose name I cannot reveal due to security concerns, in Kauda, a tiny desert village.

The NGO had dug a large “bomb shelter” (basically a huge hole) within the confines of its compound, fearing that violence would break out due to the vote. The hole was intended to protect those within from the shrapnel of bombs dropped by Khartoum’s Antonov bombers.

On the evening of January 14, 2011, an estimated 3,000 people gathered in front of the UN compound in Kauda, crying “Down with al Bashir, Up with Aziz.”² During the rally, protesters burned a Sudanese flag. Speakers and protesters decried the fact that the Nuba Mountains people were excluded from the referendum and expressed vitriol against Ahmed Haroun (wanted by the International Criminal Court on over 40 charges of crimes against humanity and war crimes in Darfur³) and his plan to run for governor of South Kordofan.⁴ The demonstrators expressed support for Abdul Aziz, a former commander of the Sudan Peoples’ Liberation Army, as governor.

A few days later, on January 17, 2011, another, more vociferous, large rally took place, at which people accused Ahmed Haroun of bringing weapons into the Nuba Mountains and demanded that he leave the Nuba Mountains.

One speaker shouted, “We know what Ahmed Haroun did in Darfur, how many he killed, and if he becomes governor here he will do the same thing to Nuba People.”

Other speakers “called out” suspected spies from Khartoum in the crowd, screaming, “Tell Bashir we are not the old Nuba Mountains when you used black men like tools. Today is the New Nuba Mountains. We are educated and we know our rights! We want our freedom! We will make a new state! We will bring back the Nuba kingdom!”

On the evening of the 18th, my interpreter, Ramadan Tarjan, a young Nuba Mountains man, came to my dwelling and said:

I didn’t think that those who said war was coming were correct but I was just informed by a man with two stars in the SPLA that the SPLA in Nuba Mountains are organizing themselves, purchasing large weapons, doshkas [pick-ups with mounted machine guns in the bed of the truck] and tanks. And the North is bringing down large weapons to South Kordofan. I now think those who say war will come are right.

The next day, a local journalist informed me that the previous day a Misseriya (an Arab militia loyal to the government of the North) had killed a pregnant woman, a southerner, at the border of the Nuba Mountains and Abyei, in one of many incidents intended to threaten people not to vote in the gubernatorial election and to stir up war. Immediately after, three SPLA officials from the South reportedly flew to Kadugli [the regional capital of South Kordofan] with bodyguards and confronted Haroun, saying, “Stop the Misseriya from attacking people. If you want war, let us finish the voting [referring either to the referendum or the forthcoming election for governor of South Kordofan] then we will come for you.”

Nearly six months later, violence and intimidation have escalated. On June 6, 2011, government troops attacked the Nuba Mountains. In a matter of days, tens of thousands of people had fled into the mountains as Antonov bombers and MIGs bombed villages, roads, and dirt airstrips. In Kadugli, those suspected of supporting the SPLA, and black Africans in general, were killed or rounded up and disappeared. Throughout late June and July reports surged that that three mass graves had been spotted just outside Kadugli. 🌐

Notes

1. For a discussion of the civil war between the North and South, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, and the 2011 referendum, please see the accompanying article, “The Birth of a New Nation.”
2. Omar al Bashir is the president of Sudan, and has been charged with genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes by the International Criminal Court for alleged crimes perpetrated by government of Sudan in Darfur; Abdel Aziz Adam Al Hilou, chairman of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) in South Kordofan, is very popular with the people of the Nuba Mountains. He fought for years with the South against the North.
3. On February 27, 2007, the International Court issued an arrest warrant against Ahmed Haroun for alleged crimes against humanity and war crimes in Darfur.
4. Ahmed Haroun has since been declared the winner of the gubernatorial election, however, there was deep dissatisfaction with the elections, and a belief among many in the region that Abdul Aziz is the rightful winner.

estimated that the result would be known by the 9th of February; this eventually changed to the 14th of February, as the counting of ballots took longer than initially planned.

Ultimately, 98.83 percent of the 3.8 million plus registered voters cast their votes in favor of separating from the North, thus splitting the largest country in Africa. In many areas of the region, the vote to separate was over 99 percent. The last issues to be worked out are North-South oil rights, the demarcation of the border, water rights to the White Nile, and the status of oil-rich Abyei (which was to have held its own referendum but now appears as if it will be decided via negotiations between the North and South).

Conclusion

Time will tell if the Comprehensive Peace Agreement holds and how well the lead-

ers and people of the South manage the process of building a new nation. The road ahead is bound to be rocky (already hundreds of buildings have been burned to the ground near the contested city of Abyei and scores of people have been killed, as different factions have engaged in battles).

Notes

1. Although ruled by the British, Sudan was technically under a condominium of both the United Kingdom and Egypt from 1899 until independence in 1956. Egypt officially abandoned its claim to Sudan prior to Sudanese independence.
2. World Bank "In the Face of Enormous Challenges, Sudan Gets Back on the Road to Recovery," (September 23, 2010), web.worldbank.org > Countries > Africa > Sudan.
3. "During the negotiations in Machakos, Kenya in 2002, the South wanted Abyei to become part of [the new] nation of Southern Sudan after the 2011 independence referendum. However, the North, keen to hold on to the oil resources and oil pipelines in the area, blocked these attempts," Walter Menya, "Why Little Abyei Is a Matter of Life and Death," *The Sunday Nation* (Nairobi, Kenya), January 16, 2011, p. 27.

4. John Garang was a Sudanese rebel leader and politician. From 1983 to 2005 he headed the SPLA. Following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, he became First Vice President of Sudan (January 2005 to July 2005). He perished in a helicopter crash in July 2005. Garang was in favor of a unified Sudan but upon his death his followers began agitating for a separation from the North.
5. Michael Abramowitz and Andrew Natsios, "Peace in Sudan's reach: Independence of the South relies on vigilance by international community," (Op-Ed), *The Boston Globe*, November 9, 2010. Andrew Natsios is the former director of USAID and U.S. Special Envoy to Sudan in 2006–2007.

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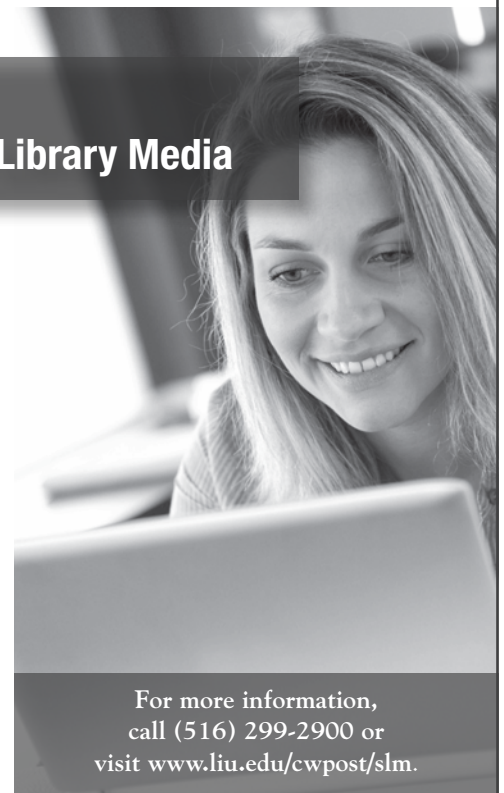
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