

South Sudan: What Are They Waiting for in South Sudan?
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OPINION

In a comment on a political commentary on the current South Sudan's quagmire, someone recently complained bitterly about the role of the "enablers" in promoting corruption, tribalism and nepotism, which can be described as some of the main determining factors of political violence and the resulting massacres in South Sudan.

They bemoaned in despair that, quote: "as one that is always optimistic, let's pretend that the instability [in South Sudan] is due to the challenges of forming a new nation that just emerged from a civil war... . All I hope for is curbing the Three BIG obstacles to development & democracy: Tribalism, Nepotism, & Corruption. We heard stories of South Sudanese... who had been living modest lives as refugees then all over sudden, upon South Sudan attaining independence, these very individuals were purchasing mansions with cash? How in the devil's name did these people get such wealth. You do the math and the answer is one of the three identified above. Even more disturbing is those enablers... " unquote.

Rightly, South Sudanese are increasingly frustrated and disillusioned by active or passive role of the international community, particularly the big three, United States, Britain and Norway who presided over the making of this fledgling state in what may now be seen as their equal enabling in its unmaking. On the one hand, we are thoroughly thankful for their significant contribution to set us free at last from Khartoum's subjugation and marginalization.

And indeed, it was precisely because of the tireless efforts of folks of good will across the globe, but more so these Troika guarantors of our freedom through the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), that our hope and expectations soared. Most South Sudanese thought that our friends having propelled us thus far will redouble their efforts to see to it that the foundations for building a viable state in South Sudan 'a la East Timor for example, are concretely laid. But such hopes are rapidly waning and are being overcome by hapless sense of despair as South Sudan continues to journey into the unknown.

It is on this other hand that there is growing fear, disgruntlement and even bitterness among many concerned South Sudanese that not only any foundations for building a nation in South Sudan continue to be lacking, but also the international community has disappointingly failed the failed state and not done enough to whip us back in line in our quest for building a just and viable state in South Sudan. This begs the question: what are they waiting for in South Sudan?

The New York Times columnist, Nicholas D. Kristof in an opinion piece entitled "Chronicle of a Genocide Foretold," and published on September 29th, 2010, once named and shamed the international community for persisting intransigence in the face of looming threats of human massacres on genocidal proportions around the world. He noted that often the international community fails to proactively prevent massacres-ethnic cleansings, war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocides before they unravel.

The international lip service and pledges of "never again" that are uttered in the wake of almost every happening of mass atrocities in our modern human history often "slips to 'one more time,'" according to Kristof. Elsewhere, Kristof details the slow and disappointing pattern of global response to human massacres while still in the making, but also when the axe finally shockingly falls on the head. In an article entitled "Genocide in Slow Motion," published on Sudan Tribune on January 21st, 2006, Kristof forcefully maintained the following:

"During the Holocaust, the world looked the other way. Allied leaders turned down repeated pleas to bomb the Nazi extermination camps or the rail lines leading to them, and the slaughter attracted little attention. My newspaper, The New York Times, provided meticulous coverage of World War II, but of 24,000 front-page stories published in that period only six referred on page one directly to the Nazi

assault on the Jewish population of Europe. Only afterward did many people mourn the death of Anne Frank, construct Holocaust museums, and vow: Never Again.

The same paralysis occurred as Rwandans were being slaughtered in 1994. Officials from Europe to the US to the UN headquarters all responded by temporizing and then, at most, by holding meetings. The only thing President Clinton did for Rwandan genocide victims was issue a magnificent apology after they were dead. Much the same has been true of the Western response to the Armenian genocide of 1915, the Cambodian genocide of the 1970s, and the Bosnian massacres of the 1990s. In each case, we have wrung our hands afterward and offered the lame excuse that it all happened too fast, or that we didn't fully comprehend the carnage when it was still under way."

In this context, the monotonous international pattern of inaction to halt massacres is clear for all to see and remains the order of the day. This is sadly also true of South Sudan. For almost a decade since the supposedly dawn of a new era of peace in South Sudan with the signing of the CPA, South Sudan continue to undesirably exhibit strong signs of protracted political power struggles, which often undermine the functionality of the rudimentary state institutions and create conditions conducive for dire humanitarian crises in all the four corners of the land. The degree of ethnic anger and hatred that has now been unleashed in South Sudan since the latest presidential decision to dissolve the cabinet is worrying and suggests that all out inter-communal violent conflict with far-reaching repercussions in South Sudan is being seriously flirted with.

Moreover, these conditions are further compounded by the abject poverty and destitution of the vast majority of South Sudanese, which remains the status quo ante. Insecurity and rise in innocent civilian death of, particularly the vulnerable members of the society has been countless and often trigger a vicious cycle of revenge attacks by the aggrieved parties. Traditional rules of engagement that previously protected the life of elders, women, children and those who run away from inter-ethnic combat situation, have been rendered just as they are-a thing of the past.

Nowadays killing of members of "rival" ethnic groups are indiscriminately practiced as ruthless massacres and ethnic cleansings have been recurrently committed in cold blood and with impunity in places like Jonglei State. The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) that recently had its mandate renewed under "chapter VII" of the United Nations Charter, has only functioned as a bystander or at best, a nurse, and has been largely reduced to a scribal role limited to documenting atrocities and innocent suffering in South Sudan!

By their own admission, the UNMISS is often quoted as reiterating that its presence in South Sudan is not to assume but to assist the Government of South Sudan (GoSS) discharge its duties and responsibilities to protect its citizens. One wonders how the UNMISS can fully provide this assistance, if they themselves also complain of lack of capacity and resources. The same is true of GoSS, who has often been quick to cite lack of capacity and infrastructure to provide adequate security in the country as their Achilles heel.

The circus created by these two actors press the important then what question about the way forward in South Sudan. Moreover, it may be asked, is this not a clear sign that GoSS is at least unable, if not unwilling all together to discharge its moral responsibility to protect its citizen? What then is being done to enhance the situation? If GoSS is unable or unwilling to protect its citizens, does this not at least make South Sudan relinquish its sovereignty status for failing to protect its citizens and consolidate its territorial integrity, and therefore justify full international humanitarian intervention in South Sudan?

What are they waiting for in South Sudan when viable and functioning state institutions are yet to be sufficiently created almost nine years after the signing of the CPA? What are they waiting for when impartial rule of law in the land remains wanting? What are they waiting for in South Sudan when the Transitional Constitution itself is in a state of disarray while many have lost faith in this Supreme and supposedly binding Law of the Land, even as increasing lawlessness dominates? What are they waiting for when human rights violations are committed left and right by the state security organs that were

supposed to protect them? And what are they waiting for when the triad of corruption, nepotism and tribalism remain on a rampant spree?

Corruption in particular, has been diagnosed as the life threatening cancer that is eroding the social fabric of South Sudan at an alarming rate, by impeding the committing of public funds to much needed social and economic service delivery and infrastructure development in the land. And how does GoSS addressed the detrimental role of rampant corruption to development and service provision in South Sudan?

First they deny this ill existed; then they argue that some of corruption allegations are fictitious and aimed at tarnishing the image of South Sudan by those enrolled in the enemy's payroll. Before you know it, they began paddling the "little state" and starting from scratch lie, while moving on to branding those who raise these issues as unpatriotic and cowards. Then they began discrediting all human rights reports which can be ascribed in part to corruption as exaggerated, and the resulting rampant insecurity as no more than pockets without any bearing on the status of the state whatsoever.

Put differently, first they turn a blind eye and protect themselves; then they exchange secretive letters; then they began pointing fingers at each other apportioning blame for the prevalence of the corruption vice. Then in a last gasp evasive attempt, they argued that the reason why corruption has not been dealt with decisively in the past was because the focus was first to ensure the successful conduct of the referendum. After all else fails, a selective application of the law and the weeding out of the fifth element, was commenced under the guise of fighting corruption. In view of mounting pressure, this process was sped up by the cabinet overhaul that also sidelined Dr. Machar and suspended the SPLM Secretary General, Mr. Pagan Amum for investigations.

While the recent political changes and "reforms" aimed at addressing some of current political challenges have ushered in a new dawn in South Sudan, however these "significant changes" remain but politically motivated measures, which thus far have proven to be not more than the consolidation of political power attempts. Therefore, whether or not the new cabinet that is being formed and re-formed, will bring positive change remains to be seen. But judging by the composition of this new regime, it is difficult to be optimistic.

There is no explanation for the absence of some of the young, more progressive and technically gifted names in the new cabinet, which goes to show that the cabinet reshuffle is another campaign to install yes man and conformist in the government. As a result, there is enough evidence to suggest that after the swearing in of the new cabinet, business is likely to resume as usual, except at probably even greater peril of escalated inter-communal tensions caused by the increasing political power struggle in the land.

Signs have been clearly on the wall all along that South Sudan has gone backwards rather than forward since the signing of the CPA in January 2005, perhaps even more backward than under Khartoum in terms of the fragmenting unity of its diverse peoples. In all this, GoSS has been identified on numerous occasions and by as many an analyst, as at the thick of it all. Unanimous consensus have built that GoSS has been destructive rather than constructive to South Sudan's aspirations of reaping the peace dividends associated with being free at last.

Some foreign advisors and analysts, such as Gerard Prunier were among the first to throw down the towel and concluded that our government is "rotten to the core." In other cases, only death gave away on some outspoken human rights activists, some of whom had to prematurely rush out of the country after receiving threats to their lives.

Opinion writers have been liquidated, and journalists silenced and had to climb over the fences of their own houses to run away in fear of death threats for shedding light on possible arms race and stockpiling for impending political battle across ethnic lines in South Sudan. Senior government officials have been on record threatening to crucify critics of the government like Jesus, and in fact they went on to order the shooting dead of any civilian in possession of firearms in locales such as the Lake State. The list is

endless, and real intervention to change the status quo and possibly avert a lurking humanitarian disaster in the making in South Sudan is long overdue.

On her first day in the job as the new U.S. Ambassador to the UN, CBS News reported that Dr. Samantha Power was raring to go and "eager to get things done," by utilize the UN's "bully pulpit" to harness some much needed changes to prevent "actions that 'trample human dignity,'" of which she specifically mentioned South Sudan as one of her priorities, among other countries. Is there a lesson or two that can be learned from the Libyan humanitarian intervention by the coalition of the willing based on the moral principle of responsibility to protect, which Dr. Power is mooted to have orchestrated that can be replicated in South Sudan?

What about the East Timor experience where the international community under the auspices of the UN closely accompanied and managed the affairs of that country when it became independent until it was up and running on its own? Diplomacy and isolation alone that the Obama administration is known to be fond of, are not enough, and neither do meetings in air conditioned halls on the 42nd street in Midtown Manhattan. Likewise public condemnations, phone calls, and withholding of funding, are insufficient. In fact withholding funds for much needed development and humanitarian programs end up biting the very poor who are supposed to be assisted and protected. Besides, the ruling clique in Juba has hoarded enough that they and their descendants will never ever have to go to bed with a growling stomach gasping for a mouthful.

As such what we need in South Sudan is some strong disincentive in the shape of more boots on the ground, especially when the baby state that was helped created by the international community is on the verge of imploding. If God forbid this happens, it will surely undermine not only the national interest of all concerned stakeholders, but will also pose a threat to international peace and security. Only when we act proactively to pre-empt lurking humanitarian disaster in South Sudan, can we atone for our complicity in enabling the current undoing of the Republic of South Sudan.

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