

South Sudan: Not in the clear yet

Written by Sarah Washburne

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SARAH WASHBURN, MAR 13 2011

In January 2011 the South Sudanese voted overwhelmingly for independence from Sudan. Over 98% of registered voters chose separation over unity. Much of the Western media has portrayed this vote as an indicator of a successful end to decades of conflict in the South. When South Sudan celebrates its independence, expected to take place in July 2011, the mood will indeed be jovial. One impediment to the anticipated independence, according to many, will be how the North reacts. Many analysts believe that the government of Sudan will not let the valuable oil fields located along the border region go without a fight. Indeed, small-scale fighting has already erupted along the as-of-yet demarcated North-South border, concentrated near the contested town of Abyei. While the issue of border demarcation and the future of Abyei are of importance, though, they cloud the real issues which will determine the success or failure of the newest country in the world.

South Sudan is setting up to be a failed state. The Government of South Sudan (GoSS) can accomplish this unfortunate failure on its own, with or without help from Khartoum. In fact, it has had the making of a failed state-in-waiting for some years now. South Sudan will have a fairly strong central government in Juba, the capital, but the government will rule in name only in the rest of the country. While so much international and domestic focus was on the political strife between the North and the South over the past years, domestic problems were neglected.

The Southern region has just completed a six-year interim period, which began with the signing of the internationally-brokered peace treaty, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), on 9 January 2005. The purpose of this interim period was for the South Sudanese leadership to develop a legitimate government that would be representative of the Southern populace. The interim period was to include the development of government institutions, disarmaments, national elections and, at the very end, a referendum on independence. It was a sort of a trial period to see how the South could handle self-governance. Yet, with the politicians, military leadership and, indeed, the international community so fixated on the North-South issues, the South-South issues were not addressed effectively.

A stroll through Juba reveals a city in the throngs of rapid development, with paved roads, multi-story buildings and even a water fountain in one of the main intersections. The scene in the rest of the country is not even comparable. Much of the South remains untouched, neglected.

The primary problems in South Sudan are insecurity and poverty. Poverty creates insecurity amongst the heavily militarised society. The insecurity, conversely, prevents development. This cycle has been difficult for GoSS to overcome, even with the help of the international community and a massive influx of oil revenue. These two issues hindered the SPLM's ability to secure legitimacy during the interim period.

The concern over insecurity has been endemic to the daily discourse of South Sudanese during the interim period. Creating a secure environment in the South was essential for the legitimacy of the government and was a foundation for future state-building efforts. Having a monopoly over the use of force is one of the fundamental indicators of a sovereign state. According to Höglund, in states emerging from war, when governmental institutions lack legitimacy they will not have the effective means to deal with violence.^[1] Further, as a government loses its supremacy over the use of force and as other armed elements in society challenge this right to the use of force, then the government will lose legitimacy further. This is precisely what happened in South Sudan over the course of the interim period. The government and the Southern army, the SPLA, lost their command over Southern security.

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The insecurity was mainly caused by left-over armed groups and local militias that had formed during the civil war, cattle-raiding, tribal-related violence and criminals who led armed assaults on vehicles and secure compounds. Currently, there is quandary of how to deal with the renegade General George Athor Deng. After losing the seat of governor of Jonglei State in the 2010 elections, he broke away from the SPLM and began fighting the Southern army as he insisted that he had actually won against the incumbent governor. He continues to rely on tribal loyalties, using forces loyal to him to create havoc throughout Jonglei and Unity States.

All of these factors feed into each other. Desperate people turn to violence, such as cattle-raiding, and they in turn are manipulated by unsavoury elements in society who rely on tribalism. Time and time again, concern over insecurity was the primary anxiety of South Sudanese living in rural areas.

The lack of development has seriously undermined the government's image as well. Initially, there were a few immediate benefits of peace, what Edward Thomas calls 'peace-dividends', such as increased mobility of the population, improvements in primary school enrolment and maternal health, and increased resettlement.[2] However, these positive steps were by and large the result of the end of the war and not the direct result of governmental policy. The end of the violence allowed more movement: of children to schools, of NGOs to remote areas and of mothers to hospitals. Overall, there was not a coherent effort on the part of the government to initiate social welfare projects on its own. Time and time again, South Sudan ranks last or second to last on most socio-economic indicator scales.

The government received over \$8 billion in oil revenue alone during the interim period.[3] An estimated 60% of this was spent on the Southern military. Most of the rest was appropriated to pay the wages of civil servants and policemen. However, civil servants and policemen went months without being paid over the past six years. The amount appropriated for development projects is unknown. This begs the question, where did the money go? Corruption is one possible answer. Ineptitude another.

While the SPLM was far from perfect during the interim period, its candidates were overwhelmingly elected into office during the 2010 elections. The fact of the matter is, there is no real alternative at the moment. While there are other political parties, they have nowhere near the capacity as the SPLM. Thus, this is political party that will rule the South for the years to come. In order to do so effectively, the SPLM needs to shift its focus from the borders of the South to within the South itself. Further, it needs to shed its military ethos and transform as much as possible into a political party that is clearly separated from the SPLA.

Now that independence is all but guaranteed, it is up to the leadership to address the intense poverty and continued insecurity endemic to the country. Looking outward to a common enemy to gain legitimacy is not going to be effective for the Southern leadership. This has been their *raison d'être* over the past six years. They sought to base their legitimacy on the peace that they had won and on the fact that they were protecting the South Sudanese from the evil, manipulative Northern government. This will not be enough to survive, though, into independence.

Essential projects must be undertaken, including: developing agricultural schemes, paving the roads connecting the major towns, ensuring security on the roads through maintaining a well-trained and competent police force, building schools and hospitals and, at the very least, sending government officials to remote areas to listen to the needs of the populace. Indeed, the current capacity of the government is not able to accomplish this to-do list. Instead of building military capacity, the SPLM needs to focus on government capacity. It must implement the decentralisation policy it has promoted in Juba, but failed to realise. Further, South Sudan has local resources which the government can utilise, include willing and able traditional leaders as well as a small but competent civil society.

The SPLM must heed the concerns of the Southern citizens. While the euphoria over independence is tremendous at the moment, once it dies down people will realise that, generally speaking, their lives have improved little over the past six years. Revolutionary legitimacy only goes so far. Eventually the SPLM will find itself facing a discontented population if it does not shift its focus after independence.

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[1] Höglund, "Violence in War-to-Democracy Transitions," in *From War to Democracy: Dilemmas Peacekeeping*, edited by Anna K. Jarstad and Timothy D. Sisk, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[2] Edward Thomas, "Against the Gathering Storm: Securing Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement," (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2009).

[3] Barney Jopson, "South Sudan Uses Oil to Ease Secession Fears," *Financial Times*, 9 February, 2010.

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Sarah Washburne is an independent researcher. She has lived and conducted fieldwork in Africa, primarily in Sudan and South Sudan.