

Summary of June 3rd Roundtable on South Sudan's Transition

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Outline:

- Context and Options to guide discussion
- Responses to the Options
- On the question of whether the agreement has a purpose
- Suggestions on a way forward
- The takeaways

Context:

- Three years after the signing of the peace agreement in 2018, the power sharing agreement has neither ended the violence nor delivered reforms.
- Despite the failure of the government, some members of the international community want to hold on to the R-ARCSS to avoid a full-fledged war in South Sudan. The international community seems to treat the peace agreement as a policy instead of encouraging a new track.
- The dilemma – The agreement calls for elections to be held 60 days before the three-year transitional period ends in February 2023. The legitimacy of the current government is linked to the duration of the transitional period -36 months.
- Time is running out.

Three Options:

- The first is to maintain the status quo by giving the current government an extension and expect the current leaders will somehow produce a democratic government despite a decade of evidence to the contrary.
- The second is to create a new track giving the people of South Sudan the opportunity to meet in an inclusive political forum and agree on a new transition led by a new leadership to transition the country to a viable state and a nation.

- The second option should be linked to the third option, which is an exit strategy for the current leadership.

Responses to the Options:

- The situation in South Sudan is unsustainable and needs a new way of thinking. The whole country is breaking down and something needs to be done soon.
- South Sudanese need a new social contract that defines who they are and how to govern the country.
- The problem is that the two men at the top of the government are willing to destroy the country, and hence, security reform cannot be achieved with these two leaders in power.
- The majority of participants prefer the second option that encourages South Sudanese to discuss a new transitional arrangement with a specific mandate to prepare the country for elections. For this to happen, a political forum is needed where South Sudanese can converge to discuss the future of South Sudan – forging a social contract that defines who they are and how to govern the country.

On the question of whether the agreement has a purpose? And if not what next?

- Some participants think that the R-ARCSS still has a purpose; the problem is that the parties to the agreement lack the political will to implement it.
- One participant thinks that there are not better alternatives for R-ARCSS and is concerned about the costs of a new peace agreement, and how long it will take to negotiate a new one.
- The majority of participants believe that the agreement has no purpose, because it has failed to achieve its objectives or fulfil its mandate. Instead, the R-ARCSS is helping Kiir to build a tribal army, to destroy SPLM-IO, and other opposition groups.
- The agreement is about the distribution of government positions. People are being killed, rampant insecurity, displacement, etc. Civic space is restricted and no basic services, hunger and poverty, etc. Women and girls are routinely subjected to sexual violence.
- Keeping R-ARCSS will lead to the rise of more armed groups organized on tribal lines to defend themselves and their territories. Therefore, extending the mandate of the transitional government will only have negative consequences, including:
 - The parties to the agreement will become entrenched in their positions.
 - Government will hold fraudulent elections to remain in power.
 - Post-elections period will lead to violence, and South Sudan will turn into a hub for terrorism.
 - Outbreak of a full-fledged war
 - The war will lead to the collapse of South Sudan.

- The failure of the R-ARCSS to achieve peace and reach reconciliation led to the Rome initiative. However, an elite-driven peace agreement tends to divide the people of South Sudan.
- The parties to the agreement are using the agreement to continue the war, maintain the status quo, and shield themselves from accountability.
- Unfair and disputed elections will lead to violence. For example, the 2010 elections led to the assassinations of rivals or those with different opinions, and widespread violence.

Suggestions for a Way Forward:

- A need for a new social contract or covenant for South Sudan.
- The people of South Sudan need to convene outside South Sudan to discuss a way forward since the transitional period is ending soon.
- A way forward must be found to address the root causes of the problems. Due to lack of a national security sector in South Sudan, there is a need for security sector reform; the solutions have to be ethnically diverse and professional.
- Economy – Chapter 4 of the agreement is particularly important. The reports that the oil revenue has been mortgaged until 2027 is correct.
- Elections, Constitution making process, and the Census are important aspects for genuine democratic changes in South Sudan.
- Security reforms through demobilization is needed, because without a better handling of the violence, there will be no change in South Sudan.
- Adoption of federalism, constitutional making, and implementation of justice and accountability are critical for reconciliation and healing.
- Women’s roles and their empowerment is especially important.

Space or Venue for Negotiation:

- A creation of a neutral space for negotiation was emphasized, whereby the peace process can become real and inclusive.

Who would supervise the new initiative?

- The international community should supervise this inclusive initiative. It will not succeed if it is left to South Sudanese alone.

Role of Community of Sant'Egidio:

- Sant'Egidio is playing a role in bringing the non-signatory groups together.
- Sant'Egidio can still create a space for dialogue whereby South Sudanese people can think creatively. However, the strategy and roadmap should be clarified to strengthen the process. It needs to be supported by Troika.
- Expanding the Sant'Egidio process to include many voices in a broader forum is crucial.

Role of Troika & International Community:

- The Troika should support a new track, beyond the R-ARCSS.
- Troika and other entities should engage as diplomats to discuss the politics... because politics, the economy, etc. are detached from the current agreement.
- There is a need for new ways to look at the situation in South Sudan, on one hand, and to do things beyond the R-ARCSS on the other.
- The international community cannot do everything as a collective or a group. Instead, each country should focus on specific issue(s) to address.
- What the international community is doing is not enough in its engagement, in that it is not talking to a wide group of people, especially in the region. For instance, someone from the international community should talk to Uganda and Sudan, which have a lot of influence on South Sudan.
- The international community seems to treat South Sudan differently from Sudan in terms of addressing its problems and the role of people in the process of making decision about the future of their country.
- Washington is not going to take ownership of South Sudan situation, but South Sudanese must.
- The international community is not pushing for elections under the current circumstances, but it can support them when all the required conditions are fulfilled.
- The United States created South Sudan; thus, it needs to play a role to bring change.
- Pay more attention to China regarding the oil sector.
- More countries should join the Troika countries in the quest for changes in South Sudan, to dispel the government's view that Troika is for regime change in South Sudan.

Sudan and South Sudan:

- The problems in South Sudan are interlinked with Sudan. What is happening in Sudan should not be ignored but taken seriously. Thus, what are the opportunities and challenges in such a situation?

Challenges of Technocratic Government:

- Technocratic government is challenging. It was tried in Sudan following the removal of Al- Bashir from power. How do we mitigate the challenges?

On Sanctions:

- Targeted sanctions are not effective because they do not affect those sanctioned but the ordinary people of South Sudan. Thus, they need to be revisited to include companies used by the government to exploit national resources to finance tribal militias.

Humanitarian Aid:

- Humanitarian aid is helping the government and is subsidizing the suffering of the people of South Sudan.
- Unlike the CPA era, the current situation in South Sudan requires security, and money or funding to effect change. Therefore, there needs to be a review of the humanitarian funding.

Main Takeaways:

- Despite some minor disagreements on the purpose of the agreement, there is a consensus that the peace agreement is not working, and thus there is a need to think about a new social contract for South Sudan. There is a need to think beyond the R-ARCSS or outside the box, if a genuine and sustainable peace is to be achieved.
- The need to find a neutral venue to convene a meeting to discuss a transitional program.
- Salva Kiir and Riek Machar must exit because their stay in power will not bring peace and stability in South Sudan.
- Sant'Egidio has emerged as a viable entity to convene a gathering of South Sudanese to discuss and find solutions to the crises in South Sudan.
- The inclusiveness of the process is to be emphasized – all stakeholders, including women, youth, opposition groups, civil society groups, academics, the Diaspora, etc.
- The expansion of the role of Troika, to include other members of the international community, AU, IGAD, etc. is emphasized.

- Sanctions without a policy are not effective, and harmful to ordinary people. Sanctions should be expanded beyond individuals to include companies engaged in the exploitation of South Sudan's natural resources, which is fueling violence.
- Rethinking the provision of humanitarian aid to South Sudan is necessary.