

Peace Agreements in Sudan and South Sudan: The Need for a Democratic Process

Christopher Zambakari



On September 27, 2012, Sudan's National Congress Party (NCP) and South Sudan's Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) [signed their latest agreement](#) in Addis Ababa under the auspices of the African Union High Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP). Despite the statements of the signatories, it is but another half-measure that cannot possibly deliver an enduring peace in a country so deeply entrenched in conflict. While this agreement temporarily addresses outstanding issues between the SPLM/A and NCP, it leaves out marginalized populations in Abyei, the Nuba Mountains, Blue Nile, and Darfur. Peace is likely to fail unless the negotiated settlement includes all key stakeholders in Sudan and South Sudan.

The agreement, signed 40 years after the first Addis Ababa Agreement ending the First Sudanese Civil War, is composed of a General Cooperation Agreement and eight protocols covering a range of areas: oil, security, trade, civil service pensions, economic matters, banking, border issues, and status of nationals. The agreement, however, omits two serious issues: the status of Abyei, the disputed state that straddles the North-South border, and the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF), an alliance of rebel groups active in the Sudanese border states of South Kordofan, Blue Nile, and Darfur.

Abyei and its inhabitants are held hostage by the political battle between the NCP and SPLM/A. As a result, hundreds of thousands of residents have either become internally displaced or refugees. In South Kordofan and Blue Nile, demarcating and securing the border is a huge problem, not to mention the challenge of accommodating the marginalized populations. The SRF claims to control forty percent of the 1,250-mile border, and Sudan is consumed by violence in the east and west, each region demanding that power be restructured. [South Sudan continues to experience insecurity and ethnic violence](#) that represent an [existential threat to the](#)

[state](#). The current approach of selective engagement in individual mediation processes cannot deliver a durable peace.

Although the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which ended the Second Sudanese Civil War, called for popular consultations in South Kordofan and Blue Nile and a referendum in Abyei, the government in Khartoum has refused to organize the Abyei referendum. The crisis in Abyei centers on citizenship and the right to vote in the referendum to decide whether Abyei remains in Sudan or joins South Sudan. Without accommodating those it affects most, the referendum will be disputed. The crises in South Kordofan and Blue Nile relate to a deliberate policy by the government to marginalize socially, politically, and economically all the regions in Sudan. While Abyei's fate awaits a referendum, failure to accommodate the SRF could easily unravel the agreement and destabilize Sudan and South Sudan.

There is no shortage of [discontent with the agreement in South Sudan](#) and among international [non-governmental organizations](#). In the state of Northern Bahr el Ghazal, there have been [demonstrations against the incorporation of the contentious "fourteen mile area"](#) within the safe demilitarized buffer zone (SDBZ), showing that the SPLM/A has failed to consult the people most affected by the agreement. Sudan has suffered historically from a lack of popular sovereignty, characterized by total disregard for popular will and democracy in political processes. Examples include dismantling the Constituent Assembly in 1958, cancelling a Southern referendum in 1982, overthrowing the parliamentary government in 1989, and excluding key political and civil actors in the North in 2005. South Sudan seems to be repeating the long-practiced ills of its neighbor to the north, and history shows that undemocratic processes tend to lead to undemocratic outcomes.

Political opportunism and the exclusion of key stakeholders from the process have long weakened the foundation of negotiated agreements in Sudan. As discussed [elsewhere](#), previous agreements, including the [CPA](#), [Darfur Peace Agreement \(DPA\)](#), and [Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement \(ESPA\)](#), have shown that those excluded from the process have had no interest in safeguarding the agreements or collaborating in their implementation. The late Dr. John Garang [noted](#), "failure to come up with a political settlement that settles the national problem in Sudan will inevitably lead to other regions taking up arms if their grievances are not resolved. To focus on one region and ignore the rest is a sure way to convince the rest of the marginalized regions that the only way forward is through an armed struggle." But the architects of the peace agreements in the two Sudans seem to have ignored this lesson.

The latest agreement between Sudan and South Sudan yet again fails to properly address the issues that fuel violence within and between these two countries in their historical, socioeconomic context. The political marginalization and socioeconomic inequalities that incentivize armed movements in both countries continue to be overlooked. Only a democratic decision-making process that brings together all the key stakeholders and results in a comprehensive political arrangement can deliver a durable peace in Sudan and South Sudan.