

# South Sudan: Searching for the Holy Grail; It's All About the Ceasefire

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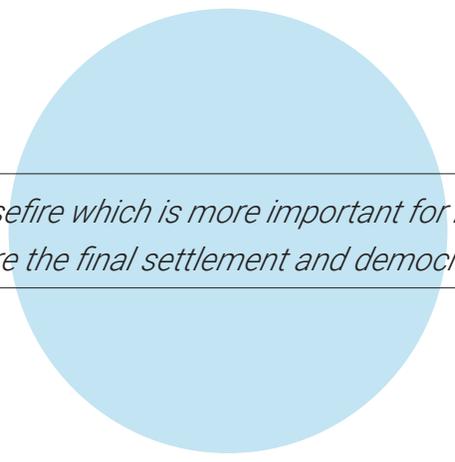
## INTRODUCTION

South Sudan gained independence from the Sudan in 2011 after many decades of brutal civil war. Given its vast natural wealth, its sympathizers had hoped for prosperity. Its detractors, however, maintained that the country was to be a backwater of unfinished contestations of its recent violent past amongst its disposed-to-risk elites. This pessimism emanated from the failure of these elites to build effective institutions and establish the rule of law. Instead, they chose to constitute a “Lame Leviathan,” which has become a crucible of failure emblematic of a restive postcolonial African state. Currently, the country is more of a cesspool of crises. The calamity which was unleashed by risky behavior of its dominant Gun Class on 15 December 2013, has caused a civil war which has placed the country at the edge of chaos.

Whilst the civil war raged on unabatingly, the warring parties reached a peace settlement in 2015, hitherto known as the Agreement for Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (ARCISS), under the auspices of Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD). A buildup of tensions between the government troops and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement – in Opposition (SPLM-IO) led to flare-ups in the capital, Juba, in July 2016. In particular, the street battles and the palace dogfight of 7 July 2016 unraveled the fragile ceasefire and sent Riek Machar – the SPLM-IO leader – on a 40-day flight to the Congolese border.

In September 2018, a sustained regional and international effort pushed the warring parties to reach a fresh deal building on the provisions of the 2015 agreement. This new accord was dubbed as a Revitalized Agreement for the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCISS). For over a year now, plethora of pre-transition tasks has been under consideration by the parties – more importantly, the permanent ceasefire modalities and security arrangements. Multiple extensions and the failure of the parties to accomplish these tasks and move on to form a unity government makes it appear as if the country is trapped in a cycle of endless “pre-transitions.”

Except for the cessation of aggressive military actions which automatically translates to silencing the guns, adhering to the catalogue of other provisions grouped under the permanent ceasefire and security arrangements has lagged or increasingly become a tall order. In theory, ceasefires are temporary halts to violence or stopgap measures that act as a step toward a wider peace. Drawing lessons from huge experience of conflict resolution from the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement and the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and similar settings in Africa – this essay highlights that it is the viability of the ceasefire which is more important for reaching the ultimate goals, which in this case are the final settlement and democratic transformation.



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## APPRAISING AFRICA'S FAILED CEASEFIRES

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**T**he tragedy of postcolonial state in Africa is suggestive of many truces which were negotiated, and which came to effect but eventually slipped through the dip of unfinished national conversations to open warfare. This raises the question of whether in these restive settings "the ceasefires do ever work?" South Sudan and its failed ceasefires in 2010 and in 2015 fall in the category of African postcolonial restive states which have experienced civil wars and failed armistices.

Clearly, the aftershocks of independence in Sudan, Angola, Zimbabwe and Mozambique – or, for that matter, those of the late 1990s national liberation war in Zaire (Congo, DR) – were triggered by a collapse of a truce. Uganda, Rwanda, Eritrea and Ethiopia have muddled through this delicate transition and a kind of stability has been observed in the last few years due to the emergence of a hegemony in the form of stationery bandit or an overlord who has decided to establish a "despotic Leviathan." These African leaders who have come into power with a "savior complex" have failed to establish a "Shackled Leviathan" but, rather, personal power whose achievement is the length of their stay in power. In West and Central Africa, different forms of regional interventions have broken this vicious circle of violence. Before we delve into interrogating the case of South Sudan, let us have a purview of some relevant case studies:

- Sudan, as a crisis state, was engulfed in a civil war since independence in 1956. In 1972, a ceasefire was reached in Addis Ababa between the government of Sudan and the Anya-Nya rebels. This ceasefire, which lasted for over 10 years, was just to unravel in May 1983 when President Nimeiri abrogated the security arrangements and some key provisions which underpinned it – especially the southern autonomy. In 2005, another permanent ceasefire and political settlement were agreed to under the CPA between the government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). Despite violations and intermittent clashes among the Joint Integrated Units (JIUs), the parties succeeded in managing a fragile truce throughout the six-year interim period. Because of the robust regional and international presence and engagement, efforts of the parties were bolstered, and the ceasefire held. On 9 July 2011, a final milestone – which was

the conduct of referendum for the independence of South Sudan – was reached, and the territory officially broke free from Sudan on 9 July 2011. Yet, South Sudan's independence had caused a breakdown of armistice in the Nuba Mountains and the Blue Nile – two areas of conflict which have been traditionally allied to the SPLM struggle – and eventually a brief border conflict between the two Sudans ensued in 2012.

- Since independence in 1960, the Congo has been fraying at the edges and has now become Africa's composite social fracture which is difficult to repair. Its massive natural wealth has been a source of promise and curse. Foreign interest and greed have resulted in an unrelenting tragedy of plunder and carnage. A war that began in 1996, which led to the overthrow of the Mobutu Sese Seko, followed on the heels of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. As part of the regional effort to weed out genocidaires from Eastern Congo, a transfrontier coalition of the willing comprising Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Angola and Zimbabwe backed Laurent-Désiré Kabila to seize power in the country then called Zaire.

Unfortunately, this coalition had soon to fragment, turning the country into a theatre for regional war. When Kabila finally removed James Kabarebe, the Rwandan general who had led the first war, from his position as Congolese chief of staff, a new rebellion named the Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie (RCD) quickly came to the fore in the east. Uganda and Burundi once again gave their support, but this time Zimbabwe, Namibia and Angola sided with Kabila. Just as Rwanda was backing the RCD, Uganda started supporting a second rebel group, the Mouvement pour la Libération du Congo (MLC), to represent its interests. Even after the withdrawal of foreign troops from the DRC and advent of Joseph Kabila to power after the assassination of President Laurent- Désiré Kabila, there was little chance that peace could be made to hold.

- In Angola, the multi-generational war which seamlessly transformed itself from an independence struggle against the Portuguese occupation, rapidly transmigrated into a well-funded proxy war drawing in both superpowers of the Cold War, and finally, into a more devastating contest for personal power and resources. At the close of the Cold War at the end of the 1980s, the conflict between untrusting

combatants of the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA), led by Eduardo dos Santos, and the União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA), led by Jonas Savimbi, ceased when the two parties signed a series of ceasefire agreements in Gbadolite, Bicesse and Lusaka. Within a year, the fatal flaws in the Bicesse and Gbadolite agreements led to the collapse of the ceasefire. However, the Lusaka Agreement of November 1994, mandated a flexible demobilization timeframe, provided for a power-sharing formula, and gave the UN adequate muscle and money to monitor the ceasefire. In December 1998, after a four-year tenuous ceasefire, the war resumed when UNITA rejected the election result. On aggregate, the country relapsed to civil war because the conflict was extremely lucrative, “personalized” and not ripe for resolution even at that critical juncture of history – the end of the Cold War. The apparent logjam in the Angolan conflict was eased with the death of Jonas Savimbi in 1998.

• Zimbabwe’s path to independence was a long haul through hard grass. Formerly known as Rhodesia, it was a British self-governing territory until the conservative white minority of Ian Smith issued a unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) in 1965. An insurrection by black nationalists spearheaded by Joshua Nkomo’s Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU) and Robert Mugabe’s Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) – coupled with a wave of sanctions and international isolation – culminated in a peace agreement in 1980 which established universal enfranchisement and, *de jure*, sovereignty for the territory. An internal settlement in 1978 with the United African National Council (UANC) brought Bishop Abel Muzorewa to the political forefront as a prime minister. In 1979, Muzorewa, Nkomo and Mugabe were invited for a constitutional conference at Lancaster House which culminated in the signing of the Lancaster House Agreement, effectively ending the Black insurgency. The odd spectacle of a superpower coddling various rivalrous groups, and a furious jockeying for positions in the new government based on ethnic solidarity, were to sire a civil war. However, the election victory of Robert Mugabe in 1980 was perceived in Matabeleland as Shona takeover. Like in the Gilgamesh Epic, the Matabeleland unrest was ended in 1987 when Mugabe and Nkomo merged their organizations, subsequently rebranded as the ZANU-PF, and agreed to share power.

Mozambique was one of the Portugal’s possessions in Africa. In 1964, the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (Frelimo) launched a guerrilla campaign against the Portuguese occupation – adding to the menu of the Portuguese colonial wars. The 1975 leftist coup in Lisbon had catalyzed the collapse of Portugal’s overseas provinces. As a result, Mozambique gained independence and Frelimo leader Samora Machel became the president. However, a cruel civil war broke out when the Mozambican National Resistance (Renamo) was formed under the tutelage of Rhodesia and Apartheid South Africa to advance foreign interests. Until then, it was popularly seen as a band of “brutal roaming

bandits” in service of the white regimes in southern Africa. Its atrocious record helped create that image. Renamo’s titular head, Andre Matsangaisa, was killed in the battle in 1979 and was succeeded by Afonso Dhlakama. In 1986, Joachim Chissano became the president of Mozambique following the death of Samora Machel in a plane crash. In early 1990, the Prelimo government ended a one-party hegemony through a new constitution which allowed for multiparty democracy and reached out to Renamo rebels for talks. A permanent ceasefire was signed in Rome on 4 October 1992, and Renamo transformed itself into a political party. But the aftershocks of subsequent elections caused a series of relapses to violence – the latest was in August 2019.

Based on these examples, the decolonization of Africa has followed a trajectory of armed struggle, a civic action, or a combined method of both. In countries which attained independence as a result of violent war of liberation – conflicting visions, leadership ambition, ethnic politics and factionalism – have ignited civil wars upon a takeover from occupiers. The incidence of civil war resulting from these factors is more prevalent in settings where armed struggle was protracted and dreadful. Where civic action was a dominant approach and arms played a second fiddle – such as in Ghana, Zambia, Kenya, Tanzania, Botswana, etc. – a transition was achieved without a state taking a self-destructing path.

In these settings, what matters most is how a fragile ceasefire is negotiated and successfully implemented for a country to muddle through this underweight of legacies to achieve a transition to democracy. Evidence abounds that all these kinds of peace settlements, which are predisposed to end a civil war, are mere armistices. Thus, contextualizing the problem within an African framework of failed ceasefires is a useful analytical entry point to the current impasse in the South Sudan’s peace.

## UNMASKING THE DECEIT

The security provisions of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCISS) were based on a faulty architecture to gloss over partisan or regional interests. Besides, the geometries that underpin this design are incompatible, which makes some of its provisions unrealistic and unimplementable, at least in the short run. This intentional misdesign as orchestrated by foreign interests and prayed to by the parties – has placed the country on a dangerous trajectory of perpetual anxiety.

Hence, we may easily miss the permanent course of the political curve if we engross our minds with R-ARCISS’s cusps and conjugate points and become wedded to this neophilia as an archetype. The true course of conflict resolution curve is treacherous, and it demands flexibility and expediency. It is sometimes stormy and unsteady, but being pragmatic while focusing on the goal is all which matters. This was the route taken for the implementation of the CPA – which

delivered South Sudan independence and to date still have plethora of substantive issues unresolved.

One of the key mandates of the R-TGONU (which is yet to be formed) is to design and implement security sector reforms which include the restructuring and reconstitution of security sector institutions. However, and as the agreement strictly stipulates, this new security force shall be drawn from the assortment of armed groups, including the government military, the police and security organs – which will have to be reunified or merged, trained and deployed prior to the formation of the R-TGONU. Based on current parameters however, this objective is far-fetched, as the former belligerents and new armed entrants are doubling down on keeping to the strategy of a bloated force in order to reward their combatants.

At the core, the future military-security establishment of South Sudan will be a vast hydra-headed coalition of armed groups with opposing loyalties and vested interests. This runs counter to the overarching objective of establishing a professional military-security apparatus. Such a security sector ought to be representative of all segments of the society; be apolitical in its doctrines and orientation; and be subordinate to the will of the people and their elected civilian government. As evidence suggests, new security sector institutions are likely to be dominated by ethnic communities which took active part in the civil war supporting either of the belligerent parties.

As a matter of fact, the CPA model of the Joint Integrated Units (JIUs), which was described as “neither joint nor integrated,” is a conceptual doppelgänger of this new architecture. The model is also a replica of the integration of forces consequent to the Juba Declaration of 2006. Pursuing this paradigm dogmatically, clearly translates into a sense of *déjà vu* – where hasty integration of various militia groups into the SPLA after the CPA almost undermined its foundations. These integration processes created a volatile mix of a vast, top-heavy, partisan security force with no clear DDR programmes. Eventually, it frayed along ethnic fault lines in December 2013 when the civil war broke out.

Succinctly, these groups may collocate physically in cantonment sites or barracks – and be nominally answerable to one commander-in-chief – so long the political nerve stays unperturbed and stable. However, these forces can easily fragment along faction and ethnicity in the event of a fallout and changing power calculi of elites in the political sphere. Logically, assembling armed groups in cantonment sites may provide a gauze bandage to cleavages (a pause in the fight) but may not necessarily dissolve the underlying inter-group antipathy and rivalry which is critical for a sustainable peace.

As observed, these pre-interim tasks are quintessentially overwhelming – and which cannot be effectively performed by an ad hoc mechanism such as the National Pre-Transitional Committee (NPTC). These Band-Aid measures,

albeit important stopgaps for confidence building, they have a short lifespan and short timelines for achieving long-term objectives. The associated timelines of these mechanisms are overly crowded with incoherent priorities and benchmarks – and these are often disrupted by a deadline diplomacy or entrenched by repetitive extensions as a lasting practice.

Notwithstanding, security arrangements and security sector transformation are the bedrock of any sustainable peace. Similarly, a new professional military-security establishment is needed to provide that missing cement for binding the nation together. Whilst the current arrangements can help the truce and provide a platform for rebooting the security sector institutions, it is safe to argue that these cannot induce professionalism. By and large, inculcating core democratic values which guide the governance and oversight of the security sector of an effective democratic state should be the overarching principle which underscores these designs.

Although important to sustainable peace, these goals are long-term commitments of any post-conflict government in transition to democracy. These cannot be approached conspiratorially and surreptitiously as the South Sudanese former belligerent parties have so far done since 2015. With cantonment of forces increasingly turning into a chimera and another connotation for recruitment and mobilization and expansion of a violent constituency by protagonists, it begs the legitimate question whether this approach will not take the country back to the same vicious circle of the python’s coils. A viable state predisposed to keeping its people secure from multiple hazards cannot be built on a quicksand of myopic partisan outlook such as securing a pie in the government or jobs and grades of honour for the loyalists.

These processes can even move faster if there was to be a unity government of stakeholders in place as early as possible. With this paradigm shift, a new government can rally critical resources commensurate to the tasks at hand, particularly funding. In this vein, a TGONU security sector cluster can easily work out new flexible timelines, reevaluate deliverables, and set new reasonable targets and milestones as envisaged by the stakeholders and required by the agreement.

Generally, security as defined remains consistently and predictably understood as a general structure which connects the existence, integrity or well-being of an object to the horizon of its damage or destruction (limits of perturbation) as the result of external threats. However, taking short term seriously is necessary because it is a key site where security policies and practices produce effects. This short-term goal is the maintenance of the ceasefire upon which everything else depends.

Assuch, focusing on the consolidation of permanent ceasefire and reaching out to the unwieldy alliance of the holdouts hitherto known as South Sudan Opposition Movements

(SSOMs), who are opposed to R-ARCISS, constitute a pillar for search for the holy grail. These measures, if adopted, can become part of a determined quest to move a country from where it is today to a place it ought to be tomorrow; which is truer, more authentic, more just and more real.

## CONCLUSION

In 2013, the disharmony among the ruling elites engulfed the country's ill-disciplined military, resulting in a civil war. So far, the meld of the country's convulsive history and protracted internal warfare among its disparate armed groups and communities have eclipsed its prospects for progress. These factors combined have continued to fray its fragile social fabric at the seams – increasingly bringing it close to a superstar going supernova.

Logically, a war ends because a party to the conflict is vanquished or a fair deal has been struck. However, reaching the desirable end-state is always difficult, given the power calculi and incentives structure of the deal. How these bargaining process influences the behavior of the protagonists to either maintain the status quo ante or alter it and the current balance of forces along the curve of implementation is delicate business for peace monitors. These uncertainties have in the past caused tensions in the security arena of the post-conflict environments in Africa, often leading to escalation and return to violence. There is no wisdom in retreading the same ground.

As this study validates, rescuing South Sudan's fragile peace is anchored in consolidating the current ceasefire. This is a kind of approach which was overlooked in similar African settings and which caused these countries to slide back to war multiple times. The IGAD, the AU, the Troika and the UN have the capacity to prevent South Sudan from losing this truce. Hence, they should refocus their engagement along this paradigm urging the parties to build on the ceasefire than chasing the fantasies of R-ARCISS misdesign.

Succinctly, the jig is up for the parties to the conflict and the international community to implement the key provisions of the permanent ceasefire and observe it meticulously. By the end of the transition, South Sudan shall have achieved a composite objective of fixing the state and building the egalitarian consensus leading to a free and fair election, which must be carefully organized and strictly monitored. The outcome of such elections must be credible. At present, some irreducible minimums and realistic bottom lines which are critical for the success of the ceasefire ought to be identified and reprioritized. Much else which is in the R-ARCISS in terms of reforms that may encumber the process can be reprioritized based on this objective reality.



### About the Author

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